

Farm System

Mark Berman chases his passion for environmentalism through his pro bono work

Mark A. Berman Hartmann Doherty Rosa Berman & Bulbulia; Criminal Defense: White Collar, Business Litigation; Hackensack



After spending a few years in Israel on business and personal matters, Mark A. Berman learned a thing or two about farm-to-table environmentalism. "In Israel, you're a lot closer to your food than you are here," says the Hartmann Doherty Rosa Berman & Bulbulia litigation and criminal defense chair. "When we returned, my wife wanted chickens so she could have her own eggs."

Berman agreed, feeling passionate not only about farm-to-table, but also about eschewing industrial farming and its environmental impacts. Soon, the backyard farm grew. "We drove our

first two sheep home in our Suburban, and as we were trying to get them into the backyard, we blew it," he says, laughing at the memory of he and his wife chasing two sheep through the streets of Upper Saddle River.

Eventually they had 30 chickens, 20 ducks, 15 geese, nine sheep and six turkeys. But it's not all funny anecdotes.

"There's a lot of death on a farm," Berman says, like attacks from predators and slaughtering roosters for food. Despite the hardships and physical labor, Berman loved the structure farming provided. "It creates bookends for your day," he says. "The barn needs to be opened in the morning and the animals need to be fed, then they need to be fed again at night and closed up in the barn to protect them."

But after 13 years, Berman and his family decided to sell their property. They purchased a fixer-upper in Vermont with more than enough space for their animals, but moving them turned into a much larger project than anticipated. Berman and his family decided to clear their farm for now and get the gang back together when the Vermont property is ready.

Most of the animals went up to Veritas Farms in New York, for whom Berman acts as pro bono counsel. The sheep were adopted by Pony Power Therapies, a nonprofit organization that uses horses and other farm animals to support children and adults with disabilities and special needs. Berman serves as a board member and as its pro bono GC, work he enjoys because of its variety. "Pony Power often has questions relating to employment, nonprofit taxation issues, and of course, questions of how best to handle COVID-related matters while dealing with an at-risk population," he says.

Pony Power, founded by close friend Dana Spett, is special to Berman. "It offers a remarkable experience and benefit to children and young adults with unique challenges, and to their parents, who are often searching for meaningful social and physical activities," he says. "It's truly become an important organization that helps a lot of people."

While Berman never considered environmental law, he's happy to report one of his children is applying to law school and considering the area.

"Many laws in New Jersey now prevent people from raising chickens in their backyard, which is unfortunate," he says, noting that not only would chickens and other farm animals provide food security, but it's a green way to control pests and garbage in local communities. "It would make

the world a much better place if everyone had four or five hens in their backyard." —REAGAN
WINTER
