

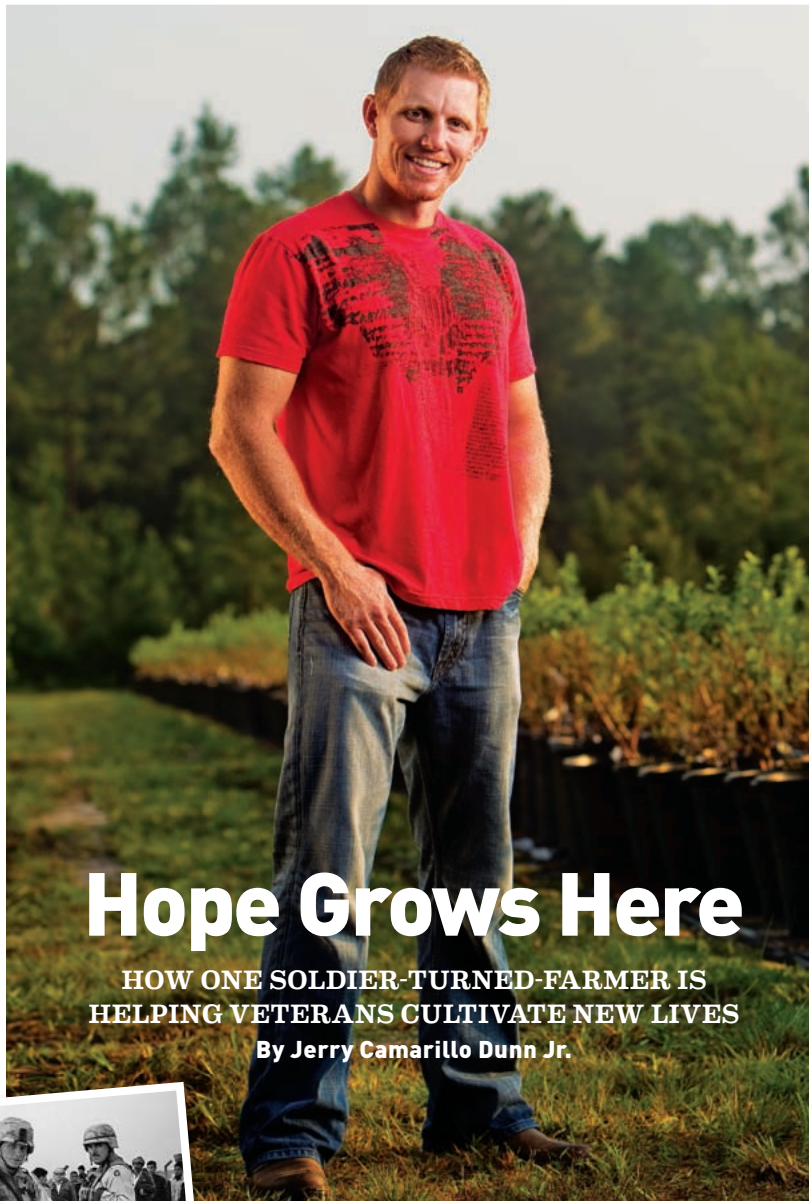
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**TO GET TO VETERANS Farm**, you head west out of Jacksonville, Fla., on a route that gradually changes from busy beltway to country highway to one-lane black-top and, finally, to dirt before you reach an open field surrounded by piney woods. For out-of-town visitors, it can seem a long way to travel. But for the man who runs the farm, former U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Burke, 34, the road there has been far longer.

Seven years ago, he was an infantryman in Iraq, at the tail end of a deployment that had felt like a 16-month descent through the circles of hell. “Two weeks before I was due to go home in May 2004, my unit was running a mission in the Sunni Triangle,” Burke says. “As we crossed a street, one of my guys got shot. I stepped out to pull him to cover, and the enemy started firing.”

Shrapnel tore into his head and legs. (Burke was later awarded a Purple Heart for his injuries.) “I was lying in the street,” he recalls. “I prayed, ‘Lord, if you get me home to see my family at least one more time, I promise that I’ll make my life worth saving.’”

Recovering in the U.S. with the help of Michele, his wife of nine



## Hope Grows Here

**HOW ONE SOLDIER-TURNED-FARMER IS HELPING VETERANS CULTIVATE NEW LIVES**

By Jerry Camarillo Dunn Jr.



**SECOND HARVEST**  
Above, Burke at his farm; left, on duty in Iraq in February 2004.

years, the onetime star athlete had trouble staying on his feet when he walked because of a ruptured eardrum. He was also gripped by intense anxiety. Doctors diagnosed Burke

with an alphabet soup of problems, including TBI (traumatic brain injury), PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and hypertension. He and Michele traveled, and he spent “a couple years feeling sorry for myself” before finding his way to his parents’ farm in Webster, Fla.—ironically the very place he’d sought to escape when he joined the army at age 17. His family gave him a two-

and-a-half-acre plot, and Burke used his disability benefits to buy blueberry bushes and irrigation equipment. He and Michele moved into a 32-foot trailer.

As Burke spent his days working in the sunshine, he noticed that his hand-eye coordination and his cognitive

**“FARMING TAKES A LOT OF DISCIPLINE, BUT SOLDIERS ARE USED TO IT.”**

functions, which had been impaired due to his injuries, steadily improved. After a year and a half, he was able to put aside his cane. One day he was struck by an idea: Since farming had benefited him physically and mentally, perhaps it could help other soldiers, too.

He also thought it could address another problem faced by returning members of the military: unemployment. The jobless rate for the most recent vets is nearly 10 percent. And farming’s challenging lifestyle is actually a good fit for former troops. Burke notes, “It takes a lot of discipline to get up at five in the morning and work hard, but soldiers are used to it.”

He relied on word of mouth to publicize his farm, and within four months, veterans—some of them disabled—began finding their way there. When Burke saw that the men in wheelchairs were unable to pick berries from bushes at ground level, he put plants in tall pots they could