



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection by Pauline Scott Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

Published in *The Delaware Gazette*: August 1, 2009

WHITE FLOWERING BUCKWHEAT DRAWS THE BEES

Stratford Ecological Center broke its own rule last week, when they named two boy kid goats in a pen outside Dublin Whole Foods, as part of a kids' agricultural afternoon. How could you tell a four year old the Toggenburg kids were nameless? So for the afternoon, Luka's son was given the obvious choice "Billy" and Liberty's son, following the tradition of using the first letter of the mother's name, Luke. Normally it becomes too personal, and therefore harder to let go, when you name an animal raised for meat. Accompanying Billy and Luke was Jessie, a small female, black Shetland sheep. They were the stars of the afternoon and attracted children like magnets, petting them and feeding them sweet spelt grain. For Stratford this is a good sign. Our mission is to educate children and adults in understanding the relationship between living things and their environment, and to plant valuable seeds of appreciation for the land and all life that depends on it.

Billy and Luke, along with four other male kids born since early April, will remain with us until October when they go to the processors. The seven female kids will either stay with us for breeding or be sold to another breeder. We are working on getting a balance between the number of goats and the other animals. Sufficient winter feed is always uppermost on our minds. Jeff Dickinson, Stratford's farmer and director, was relieved the weather allowed us to bring in another cut of hay in mid July. With the hayloft two thirds full, he is not so dependent on further cuts this summer.

Roja's piglets have been separated and we kept a male and two females for fattening. The others went to Ben and Lisa Sippel's farm in Mount Gilead, who fatten them on their waste vegetables. Ben and Lisa run a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation, supplying weekly vegetables to customers who have invested a fixed dollar amount into their operation. This spreads the risk between grower and customer, and provides the grower with capital to purchase the seed and cover expenses. In return the customer receives fresh in-season produce for thirty weeks, delivered close to home.

This year's lambs are scheduled for delivery to the processor at the end of September but as they are growing well, and in order to conserve feed, we may have them butchered at the end of August. Meanwhile, the beef steers are not growing quite as fast as we anticipated. They have not responded well to the fluctuation in temperature this summer. A hot July day finds them less acclimated than usual and out of sorts, just like people! We are planning to move them to new pasture and this will help them gain weight.

The buckwheat, which concerned us with its apparent lack of germination, has finally taken off. Presently the crop is a stunning mass of white flowers which become the seeds. Buckwheat flowers have high nectar content and draw lots of honey bees to pollinate the crop. The honey produced by these bees is highly prized. The buckwheat was planted with sunflowers and the two crops will be harvested together. The buckwheat ripens first in early September. Then we will seize the short harvesting window of opportunity after the sunflower seed is dry and before the birds gorge themselves. The sunflower

heads are crushed and the seeds fall out. These are spread and dried further until they can be used, with the buckwheat, in the pig and chicken feed mix. The goats only receive them a treat as they don't need the high protein content of 47%, other grains contain around 19% protein. We don't feed them at all to the cattle.

The heavy dews of late have been powerful enough to keep things growing, including the summer weeds. The peas should all be dry but green ones are still coming. We anticipate combining the oat/pea mix very soon. We scrunch up some of the peas as we take off the oats but there should be enough left to continue drying and later combine. We'll get some pods in with the dry peas but all can be included in the pig and chicken feed mix. In order to see our best corn it is necessary to walk over to the northern boundary. The corn beside the entrance lane has never recovered from the week's delay in cultivating between the rows, allowing the giant ragweed to take precedence. It is quite a sight during harvest when the ragweed is thrown up and covers the corn picker.

The final farm camp starts on August 3. Thursday night is a highlight as the 9-12 year olds stay all night and sleep under the stars. The area of prairie near the pond is in full bloom. Bean and tomato canning classes will be in full swing by mid August and there is a goat raising class for beginners on August 29 from 10 a.m.-noon. Try to make the time to come and enjoy the end of summer whilst picking fresh tomatoes, peppers and all the other bounty available at this time of year. I know I will be out there.

"Farm Connection" is a monthly article connecting city folk to life on the Stratford Ecological Center farm. It is published on the first Saturday of the month on the farm and garden page of *The Delaware Gazette*.

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