



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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WINTERIZING UNDERWAY ON STRATFORD'S FARM

Despite the fact that the first Saturday in October started off grey and damp, it did not deter lots of families from coming to enjoy the annual Harvest Fair on the farm at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. The big north pasture was full of children enjoying the simplest of pleasures, from a captivating puppet show operated by our two young environmental education interns, Angela Filson and Connor McGowan, to attempting to walk on stilts or fly kites. The opportunity to feed a hen drew many into the orchard, the horse-drawn hay ride was a magnet, and the line to ride the mustangs stretched halfway across the animal barn. We are thankful to the parents and grandparents for exposing their children to farm life. They instinctively react in a positive way, helping both themselves and the environment.

The new chicks we are raising to lay eggs are growing well. They continue to be in demand for picking up and cuddling by the school groups. The mature hens are not laying well. Maybe it was the time change, but fifty hens laid only two eggs amongst them one day last week. We also bought in 25 yellow day old Cornish-cross chicks to fatten for the table. To produce the chicks, Cornish hens were mated with Bovan Brown roosters. The hen is a small bird, yet an aggressive eater, while the rooster is bigger. When mated, the combined traits of a good eater and a bigger male produce a large bird with plenty of breast meat. What a plus for anyone salivating at the thought of a chicken dinner!

The spelt was planted but it was touch and go to beat the clock. We spent extra time cultivating following the initial disking, as the ground sat too long and compacted after a heavy rain. If we had left it any longer to plant, the grain would become susceptible to colder weather and possibly die off. Our feed corn supplies finally ran out and this year's corn won't be picked until this weekend. To fill the gap, the school children have delighted in walking between the rows of corn and hand picking the hard cobs. These were ground into meal and added to the chicken feed.

The hogs are managing on spelt and grazing in the newly fenced pasture. Should they come back into the barn, due to wet weather, they will receive the gleanings from the vegetable gardens at Stratford. One would think it would be difficult to drive a couple of 500 lb. females and three 150 lb. offspring from the barn to the far field. But according to our farmer, Jeff Dickinson, it was a piece of cake. The pigs were so excited to be outdoors they had no intention of turning back. As soon as the corn is picked the pigs will be moved into the field to snuffle, to their heart's content, for fallen ears and kernels.

Rosie is definitely not in pig so she and her mother Roja will likely be mated in a couple of months by a boar from Ed Snavelly's "Curly Tail Organic Farm" in Fredricktown. It has been Ed's practice to send us one of his "culled" boars to live at Stratford and serve our females.

Good news on the breeding of our ewes this winter. Marge Finnegan, Stratford's wool spinner, is very impressed with the new Tunis ram she purchased from Kathy Freeman. As a result, she has offered to purchase another ram and donate him to Stratford, rather than loan her own ram in January. This is a generous and welcome offer and it means we will lamb much earlier. If all goes well the sheep and goats will give birth at the same time. Dan Fry, the owner of the mustangs used at the Harvest Fair, has arranged for his Billy goat to come to Stratford to mate with our Nannies. Therefore, in the way of reproduction this fall, it appears we are covered!

We have been able to get on with winterizing chores around the farm. Stratford lies in a cold pocket and we have experienced three 27-28 degree frosts on the pastures. The frost kills any parasites, the bane of our grazing animals. The breeding goats and sheep have been treated for parasites and sequestered in the clean pastures. This allowed us to muck out the barn pens (and remove parasites) before the animals return to spend the winter on deep straw. Equipment has been brought under cover and engines winterized. Water lines to some of the pens are receiving attention and fire wood is being cut in anticipation of maple sugaring in February. Hopefully, there will be more sunny days but it is always good to be prepared.

In the capable hands of Laura Ann Bergman the greenhouse has undergone a conversion, from warm season crops of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, melons, and egg plants, to cool season crops of spinach, kale, Swiss chard, cilantro, lettuce, carrots and beets. By the end of November the house will be a sea of green, heated only by the sun, ready for a winter-long harvest. Don't forget we have year round u-pick at Stratford and you are welcome to come to pick and warm up!

Learning to bake yummy apple and cherry pies takes place on Saturday, November 14 from 10 am. until noon at a cost of \$15. Please call to enquire about openings if you are interested in perfecting your holiday baking skills with local farmer, Sylvia Zimmerman.

"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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