



# Farm Connection

by  
Pauline Scott

## Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

---

Published in *The Delaware Gazette*: January 7, 2012

### **FOOD COMES FIRST AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER**

The farmer and the animals at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road have enjoyed the warmer than usual weather during the last month. Roxy's three piglets were moved from the barn to the North Pasture, where it took them a week to discover the turnip roots and then go hog-wild for ten days. They were not happy to come back inside on New Year's Day, when the sharp drop in temperature caused the ground to freeze.

Farmer Jeff Dickinson and Assistant Farmer Gabe Ross took advantage of two cold nights in mid December, when the ground was still frozen at 6:00 a.m., to harvest the corn using our one-row corn picker. The deer made a big dent in the yield but the harvest proved timely, as we had run out of corn and it was time to mix up a big batch of feed.

The sheep and cattle, with the exception of Honey and Pumpkin, remain on the South Pasture, and Fields 6 & 7, eating grass down to the nubbins. Usually we move them when the grass is about four inches, but there has been enough cold weather to prevent any viruses lingering on the short grass stalks making them ok to eat.

It was pouring with rain on the day of the mock sheep auction at OSU and it was cancelled. Most of the Shetland sheep are still looking for a new home as the research station does not want this particular breed, and enquiries are welcome.

The goats are less hardy animals and they have been allowed access to the barn. The new Boer-Nubian cross buck has been a perfect gentleman during the breeding season. We are keeping him around for awhile, but he is available for purchase to anyone looking for a good buck to produce kids for meat.

Our sow, Roxy, remains in her pen to breed with a Tamworth boar on loan from Ed Snavely. We are grateful, as we avoid the expense of owning and feeding a boar all year.

The boar was delivered just before Christmas and Roxy showed little pleasure in his arrival. It hasn't helped matters that the boar will not toilet beyond the bedding area, and has soiled half of what she considers her area. Perhaps in retaliation, she will not share feed. Roxy moves from her own trough to his and pushes him away. Nevertheless, it has been noted that some effort at breeding has occurred and we could expect piglets by early May.

The young hens housed in the children's garden pen were released into the garden to forage, but it was not long before we decided it was more prudent to return them to their pen and wait for the ground to freeze. The orchard hens fare better on the grass beneath the apple trees and they have been allowed to roam as usual during the day. Unfortunately, despite a six feet wire fence around the perimeter and a dense ten feet high evergreen arborvitae hedge on the north side, the hens have met with two big problems.

The first comes in the form of a Cooper Hawk, aka a Chicken Hawk. He uses the hedge for cover and then pounces on sheltering small and medium birds to provide his dinner. His territory has expanded into the orchard and his prey includes the smaller hens. The second problem, hard to believe unless you see it, is a red fox that scales the wire fence in order to dine on defenseless hens. To date we have lost two hens.

It is unusual for a fox without pups to be taking such a risk in broad daylight, so our plan of action is to make ourselves a lot more visible, and hope both the fox and the hawk will take the hint and seek food in our abundant fields and woods.

Food is, of course, a big reason for our education program. We want to share knowledge of where food originates, which is NOT, as some children respond, in the grocery store. We encourage everyone to think about what they eat, what animal or crop produces that food, and how it is raised or grown. Once people begin this process they realize they do have a part to play, and can have a say in the raising of the food they put in their mouths.

Stratford loves to serve good food and our latest effort was three-tiers high, when we provided afternoon tea on the farm to new visitors. Open-faced sandwiches garnished with flowers, herbs and vegetables from the big greenhouse, flakey scones topped with yellow local cream and home-made lavender jelly, and tiny cakes and lemon-filled tarts topped with a blueberry, filled the length of white-clothed tables. Food brings us together, it is our heritage and it is up to everyone to ensure it will always be available. We hope you can join us around the table sometime in 2012.

**"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*.