



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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SHEEP AND GOATS KEEP INVASIVE SPECIES AT BAY

It has been wonderful to experience blue skies and temperatures in the low 70's during the last two weeks, after the excessive heat this summer, and the heavy rains that fell the last three days of September. Many local farmers were unable to harvest their beans and corn due to the wet weather. Here at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, with only corn to harvest, it was not a problem to delay harvest. Farmer Jeff did take the precaution of erecting a two-strand electric fence around the corn in fields 3 and 6, to dissuade the deer from availing themselves of an easy meal!

A small area of woodland has been fenced off adjacent to field 7, in the vicinity of the Sugar Shack, in the hope that the sheep and goats will graze the invasive vegetation. This is not something we usually practice, and if we can keep the animals inside the fence it will be interesting to see the results. Six mature Tunis ewes were introduced into our flock, thanks to long-time Stratford friend Marge Finnegan, who retired from farming and donated them. We are grateful for her past generosity, and thankful we can depend on her advice in the future.

It used to be common practice to allow hogs to roam in the woods in the fall and eat acorns. We intend to put our young hogs out in due course. Meanwhile, with the advent of cooler weather the hogs have been allowed to root in the south pasture. The young school children are delighted to engage with them. Hogs, like dogs, are intelligent, trainable if given attention, and well-mannered when interacting with children. Mother sow, Bella, is in the adjacent backyard and her family gathers at the gate, where Education Coordinator April Hoy, is convinced they converse.

We share with the children that the purpose of a farm is to provide food, and this month the last of the lambs, and two steers will go to the processors. There is plenty of lamb for sale, as well as ground beef, and soon a wide selection of beef. The hogs are scheduled to leave in January.

The beef and dairy cattle look really well, with shiny coats and rounded bodies. This is a good state to approach the leaner winter months, although there should be no shortage of hay this year. Farmer Jeff would like to have a contractor bale green hay, as there continues to be an abundance of clover and grass. However, owing to the comparatively small acreage involved, it is not an economical proposition.

The heritage apple crop was abundant again this year, and one of the walk-in coolers is being used to store them. The school children will throw the apples into our hand-cranked cider press, and savor the results. We were fortunate to receive a large quantity of donated apples, and these will be taken off site, and made into cider. We have room to freeze the jugs until February, when the cider will be heated in the patio fireplace, and will warm 5th Graders taking part in our Messages from the Earth program.

Another cooler space is used as a supposedly secure place to store seed grain. Two years ago several holes were plugged by spraying on a foam-like substance, which hardened to form a great seal. The mice must know it is only guaranteed for two years! They are now in the cooler, diminishing the supply of buckwheat seed, which the early summer wet weather prevented us from planting. Repair work urgently needs doing before the arrival of the alfalfa, clover and timothy seed, some of which has to be stored intact until next spring.

One of the bigger family events at Stratford, the late September Fall Festival, attracted more families than ever. It seems they are still drawn to participate in the timeless simple activities. The second 5K run/walk, held prior to the Festival, actually saw less participants this year despite its unique route through the fields and woods. This may be due to a proliferation of 5K's, and an increasing interest in 10K's. We hope to widen our publicity next year, and perhaps offer a 10K option.

You are welcome to come out and run or walk those same paths during open hours, take advantage of the fall sunshine, and appreciate the changing colors. Please check out our website, or sign up for a monthly e-update, to keep informed of the many opportunities to enjoy this beautiful working farm.

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