



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

**Farm Connection**  
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Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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## **STRATFORD HOGS SPENDING THE HOLIDAYS ON THE FARM**

The first snow fall of the season occurred on December 11 at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, followed by a heavier snow December 13, creating a winter wonderland in the woods, fields and gardens. The animals have retreated to the barn where Farmer Jeff is juggling space in the pens due to their persnickety preference of company, and the size of the eight market hogs.

Our hogs are usually processed between 200 and 240 lbs. for ham, bacon and sausage meat. After a period on pasture devouring plenty of "grub" protein, the biggest appear to have exceeded the desired weight. We cannot prove this by weighing, as we do not have a costly scale, although we would gladly provide a home for one no longer in use. Farmer Jeff could step into the pen during a quieter moment when the hogs are feeding, and use a cloth tape to measure around the girth behind their forelegs, and from the base of their ears to the base of their tail, then calculate their weight using a formula. I like the idea of practicing a little math and seeing how close the guesstimate, but those hogs are intimidating, and perhaps eye balling is close enough!

Providing they can be processed quickly to prevent "fat" gain and additional feed costs, there is no problem, but here lies our dilemma. Months prior to the hogs reaching their market weight Farmer Jeff arranged a date to ship the hogs, based on their estimated growth and our preferred processor's calendar. It is always a bit of a shot in the dark. The date is January 11, and set in stone due to the small operation. Despite numerous calls there are no openings at any other processor. Maybe somewhere will open-up, otherwise we will be sending off fatter pigs in January.

The six Tunis ewes who joined the flock in early fall don't like the aggressive goats. As they were not about to mess with them the ewes would lie down in the back field until all the goats settled in the barn. Unfortunately, they influenced the other sheep, forcing Farmer Jeff to take hay outside to feed all of them! Now that he has reorganized the pens they no longer loiter outside. Some of them even munch hay side by side with the cattle, much to the cattle's annoyance. Who said the pecking order needs to be in order of size!

Bob Noble, father of Stratford beekeeper Dave Noble, has saved us a great deal of money by bringing his sawmill to Stratford. He and a friend, along with the Tuesday farmhands, generated over 1,200 board feet from ash, cherry, maple and walnut trees downed by ash borers or weather. At an average price of four dollars per board foot that amounts to \$4,800. Carpenter Dan supplied Bob with special-order dimensions for gates and re-decking the wagon. The rest will be used for benches, bridge and fence repair. It was quite a sight to see the machine strip off the bark, roll, and square up the log before cutting into boards. Many thanks to Bob and his crew.

With the snow covering it is much easier to see the tracks of the numerous animals who make their home at Stratford. Buddy, the farm dog, loves to run the trails in the prairie as his nose picks up the scent of all using the pathway. He flushed out a coydog, likely a cross between a coyote and a German Shepherd, known to live on the premises. Fortunately, Buddy was too intent on following his nose and did not notice the movement and chase it. He would have come off the worse in that encounter.

A lone Great Blue Heron is also making its home in the prairie, enjoying some late fishing until the pond freezes. Most blues migrate south, but a few hardy souls persist staying in Ohio. Once the pond ices over he will move to the fields and eat his favorite food, the meadow vole.

We welcome you to take a walk in the snowy landscape during open hours 9 am. to 5 pm. Monday through Friday. We will, however, be closed for our annual holiday from Thursday, December 22 until Tuesday, January 3, when for a very short period the children's voices will be stilled.

We wish you a very Happy Holiday, and hope you will include Stratford as one of your new year resolutions and visit us at least once every season.

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