



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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ENCHANTED EVENING "RAIN PLAN" WORKED AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Life was extra busy at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road during the record hot and humid weeks prior to our annual fundraiser on Saturday, August 13. It was the sixth time we have hosted the event called "Enchanted Evening." We wanted the farm and gardens to look their best as 200 guests arrived to dine, and be entertained, under the big top on the lawn. Guests were seated at tables for eight, graced with white linen, table service, and a tall, glass, candle-lit center piece.

Operation "Rain Plan" went into effect two days before the event, as there was little hope of a dry evening. The silent auction and Hors d'oeuvres were switched from the patio to the big room, where folks would appreciate the air conditioning whether raining or not. Four of our generous community restaurant partners were grouped under the covered patio, and the other five under tents adjacent to the big top. The decadent dessert cupcakes had to be kept in the walk-in cooler in the barn. A plan was devised to plate and carry them from the cooler to serve the guests, with the use of umbrellas if necessary!

The forethought was well worth the effort. Three downpours did not phase anyone, including the two handsome Haflinger horses, Tom and Jerry who pulled the mini-hay wagon, or its occupants. These days few people have a chance to be around horses, and they are drawn to them. This gentle pair allowed themselves to be petted to everyone's heart's content.

After dinner a "lively" auction took place. Suzi Rapp from the Columbus Zoo, our evening presenter, surprised us by offering an up close and personal backstage tour of the zoo. Two people bid against each other for the honor, until the bidding reached \$1,700, then one person dropped out. However, it did not end there. Another Zoo representative stood up, and said he would offer the same tour to the second person, if he were willing to pay \$1,700. He was, and the Zoo and bidders received appreciative applause. Stratford, too, heartedly applauds and thanks all those who were involved with this year's successful event.

If you missed out and did not get a chance to pet Tom and Jerry, all is not lost. They will return, with their owners, Doug and Cheryl Green of Ostrander, on Saturday, September 24 from 10 – 4 pm. at our Harvest Fair. We invite you to save the date. It is a great family day, with lots of hands on activities for kids, music, cider making, and much more throughout the farm, gardens, barn, and front lawn.

The animals went on with their lives as usual during all the Enchanted Evening activities. But the heat and humidity has affected them at times. It lowers their resistance to the ever present intestinal parasites. Fortunately, the problem is not too bad this year thanks to the rains providing abundant pasture, allowing us to move the animals regularly and break the worm cycle.

The hens have suffered from body mites, and we could use a new, clean, fenced area to allow them to run. We have put sand boxes, topped with diatomaceous earth, in their existing runs. The hens use them for dust baths, and the absorbent properties of the earth causes the mites to dehydrate and die, and protects against further infestation.

We would dearly like to reduce the feed to our eight fattening hogs, by putting them out on pasture and allowing them to graze. Their growth always improves and we save on feed. They would have a great time in the south pasture, rooting around on the pile of farm yard manure. Also, the manure would benefit and decompose more quickly.

Alas, hogs are the most susceptible farm animal to sunburn, and really need the assurance that water is always available, so we have to wait for the temperatures to drop. Hogs do not have much hair covering, and they do not sweat. Hence their love of rolling in the mud to cool off, giving them the reputation of being a dirty animal when in fact they maintain good hygiene practices.

The barn is two thirds full with 2,000 bales of hay. A record at this time of year. We have a third cutting yet to come off the fields. In order to store these bales, they will need to be carefully stacked up to the roof. It may take another elevator to get them up to the stackers in their very hot roosts.

The spelt straw has been stored in the small machine shed. The spelt seed, which averaged 60 bushels per acre, was dry enough to leave in the gravity feed wagons. The seed will be transferred to the shed and stored in wooden bins once they have been cleaned.

The greenhouse and children's garden tomatoes have ripened and taste wonderful. The field tomatoes are coming along, as are the weeds and the grass separating the rows! It has been the best blackberry season for the last five years. The thorn-less blackberries are painless to pick, but bland compared to the thorn varieties. The wild black raspberries and the elderberries have been good.

The bees on the farm are definitely improving the pollination of our apple and peach trees. Most of these trees were planted in the early 90's, when Stratford was being created as an educational farm. The peach tree beside the big green house was so laden that its two big branches literally snapped off. They were shored up to ripen the peaches but it has not worked, and the tree will need to be removed.

With the children returning to school, it will be quieter for a few weeks before the first of the school tours, and our Messages from the Earth program. Stratford is not open over Labor Day weekend, but we invite you to come out other days to pick tomatoes and vegetables, and generally enjoy the ambiance that is inherently a part of Stratford.

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