



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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CLARABELLE BORN WITHOUT FANFARE AT STRATFORD

March went out as gently as it came in at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. Gentle, however, cannot describe the last couple week's weather. Instead of mild April showers temperatures have been in the twenties with frosts. This would not have been a problem in a normal season, but with all the warm winter days the fruit buds have swelled more quickly, and in some instances flowered. It is now a case of wait to see if Mother Nature has simply thinned the fruit, or eliminated it this year.

Our new sow, Bella, surprised us by delivering her piglets one week prematurely on St. Patrick's Day. Bella gave birth to twelve piglets, three of whom regretfully did not survive, and another died a few days later. These deaths may explain why pigs have such large litters, as the rate of survival is rarely one hundred percent. Bella is proving to be a good mother, and the remaining eight are growing steadily. They are as beautiful as their mother's name and love lying in a huddle under the heat lamp, yet they instinctively spring up and latch on when Bella positions herself to feed them.

Three year old Sweetie, the daughter of our big Red Devon cow, Sweet Bessie, gave birth to her first calf in the barn yard around mid morning on Saturday, April 2. During morning chores Sweetie showed no signs of restlessness, a sure indication of a pending birth, so it came as a surprise when a visitor reported we had a new baby. All was well, and the calf was carried into a pen, followed by her mother. The heifer calf will become a member of our beef breeding herd. Her name is Clarabelle.

As a first-time mother Sweetie was nervous during the calf's first suckling, but it was not long before her instincts took over. Not only would she allow Clarabelle to feed, but she became very protective. Farmer Jeff's family have a new pet, an eleven month old rescue dog named Buddy. Buddy was curious about the new calf, and he was watching through the fence when Sweetie let him know, in no uncertain terms, to keep away by charging right up to the fence!

Buddy is the first dog to live with the family at Stratford. It has been a concern that a dog would not get on with the visiting children and/or the livestock. Buddy is actually behaving very well for such a young dog. He respects the bigger animals, the sheep are no longer afraid of him, and once he curbs his over enthusiastic greeting of the children he will be the perfect dog for our situation.

Dan Hoover, a member of the Tuesday farmhand crew, built and delivered a unique indoor baby chick house on March 31. It was a wow moment as it rivals a doll house, and its inhabitants are real! Created from wood and wire, it stands waist high making it easy for children to see the chicks. A high flap on the front folds down and an adult can reach inside and pick up a chick for the kids. Newspaper and wood shavings line the wire floor, with a

tray below to catch any debris. A heat lamp, critical for warmth, hangs under the sectional roof, and a large mirror covers the rear wall. We really appreciate this new addition!

Education Coordinator April Hoy could not wait for our own eggs to hatch in the classroom incubator and immediately purchased six day-old Rhode Island Red chicks from Tractor Supply Company. I find it amazing that the cost per chick was only \$1.99. It seems such a bargain. Seven of the eight eggs in the incubator finally hatched, and the new chicks were accepted into the house by the older tenants.

There are a total of eleven lambs. Some are old enough to go out into the pasture with the ewes, but with the wet, cold weather Farmer Jeff has kept them in the barn. One pair of lambs is particularly friendly, and they allow the guides to pick them up when the children come into the pen. Everyone enjoys the up close and personal, but none more so than the guides! To date there are four goat kids. The twin preemie kids, with under developed lower legs and hooves, are gradually improving their stance. One wore splints for a week, but these were removed after they rubbed and caused sore spots.

The grass is now greener, the healthy spelt in field 1 stretches in lines like sentinels, and the early wild flowers are a good size. But they are fleeting, so it is necessary to make regular trips in the nature preserve to view these jewels.

A good time to see the wild flowers would be during our Earth Day tree planting and garlic mustard pull on Saturday, April 23, from 9-1 pm. No registration is necessary and instruction is provided. On the same day from 10-noon, Naturalist Bob Harter will explain how to grow natives. The cost is \$20 and advance registration is necessary.

There is also an opportunity on Tuesday, April 26, from 11-1 pm. to join an Edible Plant ID Walk in the gardens and preserve, followed by a sumptuous lunch using the spring edibles. The cost is \$20 and reservation is required. Then on Saturday May 7 from 10-noon, Bob Harter will lead a Wild Flower Walk. The cost is \$5 per person, and registration is requested.

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