



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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BUMPER YEAR FOR HONEY AND HAY AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Evidence in the form of lush growth in the hay fields and orchard, as well as flowering plants, at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road confirms that last winter was indeed a mild one. Plants did not die back as far, and when they awoke they had a kick start, and took advantage of it. Fortunately, the last few dips in temperature did not adversely affect us, as regretfully happened to others in Ohio. This is not always the case, as Stratford has its own micro climate and can often be much colder than surrounding areas.

As a result of this abundance the bees have produced so much honey that Stratford's beekeeper, Dave Noble, had insufficient empty frames to add to their hives. He and his team of volunteers ended up harvesting honey on June 8, and storing it in bulk, so they could recycle the frames back into the hives. The honey will eventually be available for sale to those willing to bring in their own containers. Hopefully, Beekeeper Dave will save some for the 3rd annual Honey Bee Festival to be held at Stratford on Saturday, June 25 from 10-4 pm.

The two fattening hogs who were turned out into the back yard in mid-March, were processed by the end of April, and we still have pork for sale. As predicted, they plowed up the area with their snouts whilst hunting for grubs, and deposited a generous amount of natural fertilizer. As soon as the last one departed, Farmer Jeff harnessed a harrow to the tractor, and created a smooth planting surface in order to reseed the area. He chose an all-rye seed mixture called Magic Mix, containing two different types of annual rye, and two different perennial ryes, and they have grown incredibly well. I could hardly believe the difference last Saturday, when I walked a group out of the dimly lit barn to stand in the sunshine and view their surroundings. Magic indeed!

Just after Memorial Day the first hay was brought in from fields 8 and 9. These fields are the furthest away and adjacent to Rt. 23. They are not totally fenced, so do not play a part in the rotational grazing of the livestock. The fields continue to produce quality hay, and will remain in 'permanent pasture' until deemed necessary to spend time and money to cultivate and reseed.

A record amount of hay was brought in this week from several fields close to the Barn. It was fortunate the weather cooperated. The longer we wait the shorter the period to take off 2nd and 3rd cuttings, which, come winter, are sorely needed. Field 3 always contains myriad crops, including the permanent blackberry bushes, the raised beds where we grow vegetables for PIN, and the annual pick-your-own vegetables. This year spelt awaits harvest; an acre of hay had its first cut; and the winter rye was recently mowed and left to decompose before it, and the old rhubarb patch, are planted with Iron Clay Cow Peas to further improve the soil. A 'mixed farm' like Stratford, is not only visually appealing, but it is one of the best ways to improve and maintain soil fertility, and ensure the land is kept in good heart.

Corn was planted in one acre of field 3, as well as in the east half of field 4, and part of field 6. In the remainder of field 6, a diagonal strip of blooming white buckwheat jumps out at you. Beekeeper Dave added more hives there to take advantage of buckwheat's attraction to bees. Field 7 will remain fallow as long as possible, before planting the east half in a Timothy/clover mix and the west in a clover/alfalfa/ rye mix. Farmer Jeff used spiked tooth harrows to break up the pan caused by deluges of hard rains and drought, and compounded by the weight of grazing animals.

For the third year in a row the Oman Brothers from Ostrander have generously loaned us their Red Devon Bull. He was a young animal when he first mated with our cows and heifers. He did not look the picture of a bull! Now, even from a safe distance, it is obvious he has matured and filled out. With his big horns he looks every bit a bull. Sweet Bessie, our Red Devon beef-breed Matriarch, and Sassy, our Jersey dairy-breed cow did not produce a calf this year. They showed immediate interest in the bull, and are being given one last chance to earn their keep and stay on the farm, by producing a calf next year!

Come out and spend some time with us this summer. There is no shortage of things to touch and smell. Last Tuesday the women gardeners prepared one of the semi-circular beds beside the Gazebo, and planted scented geraniums and sweet smelling lemon grass, donated by Sue Harter. Sue is part of the local community who sell their plants, baked goods, eggs, soaps, etc. at the Delaware Farmers Market, held on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning in downtown Delaware. I can think of nothing more perfect than a combined visit to the Market and Stratford on a bright, blue day with a little breeze.

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