



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
by Pauline Scott
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

Published in *The Delaware Gazette*, July 13, 2016

FAMILIES FLOCK TO STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER FOR STORY TIME

Eighty-eight families showed up at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road last month to enjoy the "Story Time on the Farm" as they geared up for school vacation. Mothers shared details through the media, and a couple of Moms' Clubs decided to come. Usually we have ten to twenty families, and we do not burden them with pre-registration. We had no idea so many would turn out!

The regular parking was already full of volunteer cars, as Tuesday is our busiest day. The Tuesday gardeners stopped planting to direct drivers and carefully park cars in every available spot. Despite their care, Farmer Jeff could not swing the haying equipment out of the barn, and the Tuesday farmhand crew could not continue making feed.

However, the crew took the bull by the horns, in a manner of speaking, and made hay in a different kind of way while the sun shone. They simply joined in the fun, and helped kids climb up on to the tractor seats, and guided them around the barn. Not many moms or children actually heard the story that day, instead they set off in groups to explore, and finished up with a picnic on the lawn. This month twenty-two families showed up, and the no registration policy remains in place – for now!

Gardening the following week was so much quieter. There was time to visit the barn to see a new surprise in the form of a five-day old chocolate-colored lamb. The Tunis ewe conceived close to the time the rest of the flock started lambing in late January. Her teats became blocked a day after the birth, and the lamb soon dehydrated, but Farmer Jeff came to the rescue and both quickly recovered.

Bella, our Tamworth sow, was placed in a pen by herself after her piglets were weaned in early June. She looks really trim and healthy. Farmer Jeff needs to figure out the best time to get her in-pig, so farrowing coincides with the most school and adult visitors. The young piglets are always a star attraction. Bella's latest offspring are now four months old, long, lean, and bursting with energy. They are not quite heavy enough to market, and we wish they were as they are eating us out of house and home.

Every animal and bird on the farm has a special job. The numerous barn swallows provide natural insect control in the barn, even eating off the cattle's back. They have built mud mansions and cottages on top of the light fixtures underneath the hayloft. Once their babies are born, and they start poking their heads above the nest to await feeding, the swallows make a real commotion in order to drive anyone, and anything, from the vicinity.

The sheep tend to gather in the barn during the heat of the day, and then wander back to the fields. It was very odd to suddenly notice a young goat steadily walking along in the center of a long line of sheep. The goat was actually a yearling who spent early winter by herself, being too young to breed. When the ewes were penned in preparation for lambing, she was put in with them for company and quickly bonded. She still does not realize she is a goat!

There were two highlights at our third annual Honey Bee Festival on June 25. One was two short documentaries on bees, prepared by students from Hyatts Middle School. The students had prepared

a total of twenty- four documentaries for a film festival held this year at the AMC Lennox Theater. Stratford's beekeeper Dave Noble was impressed with the quality of their work.

The other highlight was the exciting and engaging speaker Mark Berman, the "Bug Man" from Columbus. He set up an insect table including Luna moths and a Tarantula spider, and made a fascinating presentation on little wasps. The audience was so engrossed they were upset when he wound up his talk. Mr. Berman graciously stayed until 5:30 pm. answering questions.

Another kind of highlight, this time for the 6-8 years old farm campers, was a visit by the Ohio Wildlife Center to share some of their animals. This is a great new partnership to widen the camper's horizons beyond their Stratford experiences. The Center brought a possum, an Eastern fox snake, a snapping turtle, a kestrel and a screech owl and they were hits with the campers.

The first of the blackberry bushes at the north end of field #3 are laden with big berries, perfect to U-pick for pie making or jam. The one-year old canes were tip pruned to encourage more fruiting next year. Around a hundred pounds of garlic, grown from our own seed, was harvested from various locations at the end of June. We planted about twenty pounds of seed, and saved \$240. The bulbs have been drying on a flat mesh bed, and are now available for purchase.

Tuesday farmhands and our three agriculture interns planted tomatoes, tomatillos, and peppers in field #3, to the tune of nearly five hundred plants that we grew from seed. Two hundred new tomato cages were installed to prevent any fruit rotting when laying on wet ground. These vegetables will be available for U-pick in late August and September, and for frequent deliveries to PIN.

Tickets are still available to our elegant Enchanted Evening affair on Saturday, August 13 from 5:30 pm. Delicious food selections from numerous local restaurants will ensure no one leaves hungry! Romantic carriage rides will meander along the field lane, plus live jazz music, and a silent and live auction.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Road, Delaware. She can be reached at 740-363-2548 or by email at info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org.