



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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STRATFORD INTRODUCES ARCHERY TO BOOST FARM CAMPERS SELF ESTEEM

This year's haymaking at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road started after Memorial Day in fields 1 and 2. By late Friday afternoon June 2nd seven trailer loads were in the barn. This amounted to a satisfying 675 bales. The temperature was about perfect for working, and there was plenty of help from the haying crew and this year's farm camp and agriculture interns. It was a different story in field 8 last Monday, with temperatures in the low 90's and high humidity and less interns, as farm camp was in its second week.

As usual our farm camps are sold out and they are a whirl of motion and flashes of color. The tie-dye squares hung out to dry quickly became headscarves. A new activity for the 9-12 years old is archery. Karen and Dorrie Andermills, certified U.S. Archery Instructors, generously consented to travel from Columbus four days a week for three weeks to teach the art they love. They brought 15 bows of varying draw weights, along with different length arrows with colorful-flights, gloves, and arm guards for protection when the string is released.

The women prefer the wanna-be archers to begin by shooting arrows at white poster boards affixed to straw bales. They have the kids write and circle words on the posters of things they are grateful for like family, farmers, and pets. This way they have more to think about than aiming at the usual bull's eye, and generally ensures they hit a spot somewhere on the posters. The campers listened attentively to the instructions, did not cross the red safety line, and stepped eagerly to the shooting line 7 yards from the target. After a day of inside safety instruction necessitated by rain, followed by a day of posters, they begged for the real target. They were good!

The idea behind offering the sport is just as much to promote a feeling of empowerment as hitting the bull. It gives even the most introverted child an opportunity, when they pull back the string and let go, to experience the strength they have created with their own hands. I have no doubt the Andermills will be requested to return next year.

Donna, our Tamworth gilt, gave birth for the first time on May 22 and presented us with four healthy piglets. We were a little disappointed there were not more, but she is young and there will be a next time. The boar is a permanent fixture, and Donna will be mated after weaning and fully recovered. She recently devoured a wheelbarrow load of sod, as a way of maintaining her iron levels.

While hay was being stacked in the loft, her mother Bella was observed in the pen below standing for the boar. Fingers crossed she will give birth in late September, or we may no longer want to keep her.

Sugar, our matriarch Jersey cow, whose mother Maple was born at Stratford in 1998, was thirteen this year. Sugar last calved in 2015 and produced a heifer called Socks. We kept Socks, and she will be bred to the Red Devon bull who has been on loan to us since May. Sugar earlier gave birth to heifer calves Molasses and Pumpkin. Molasses's calf Sassy and Pumpkin remain on the farm for breeding. You can see the artful family tree hanging in the barn, created by spring education intern Sierra.

Sugar began to show serious signs of aging this year and lost condition. Farmer Jeff made the decision that the kindest thing to do was to let her go to the processors. It was hard on her hips to walk up the ramp into the trailer, however she descended with great dignity, befitting a cow who has been a perfect friendly example of where milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, meat, leather, you name it, comes from, to tens of thousands of visiting school children.

Day-old chicks arrived in early spring, and along with the chicks hatched in the classroom and our laying hens, we have more than 90 birds. A lot to manage, and at the very least many of the roosters will soon become soup.

The rows of tomatoes and peppers for u-pick beside the Giving Garden have been mulched with rye straw, including the seed heads, which was planted last fall as a cover crop. The long roots will remain in the soil to decompose, keeping the ground aerated for more microbial activity, and better absorption.

Enchanted Evening, our elegant annual fund-raiser, is changing its location this year. We are moving to The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium – Africa Event Center to experience a Sunset on the Savanna. As usual there will be a jazz band, a silent and live auction, entertainment, hors d'oeuvres and food tasting stations. A new feature will be a cash bar, and the opportunity to purchase a special "Stratford" drink. The event is planned for Thursday, August 10 from 4 – 10 pm. Free parking and admission to the zoo is included. For further details and to make a reservation please visit our website.

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