



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by
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Published in *The Delaware Gazette*: July 13, 2017

SUMMERTIME AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

There was no farm camp at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road during the week of July 4. The Education Interns took a well-deserved week off, and the staff enjoyed an extra-long weekend at home.

We try to get the word out that we are closed on holidays, however people showed up to spend their leisure time visiting the farm animals and walking the fields. Farmer Jeff graciously greeted them, forfeiting his own downtime, which is typical of Stratford's long-term Director and current Farmer. Whether there are visitors or not, farming is still a 24/7 occupation for him, as the responsibility of caring for the animals never takes a holiday. It's a good thing for us he loves the daily challenges of life on an educational farm!

The weeds in the greenhouse, flower beds, and vegetable areas took full advantage of the lull in pulling, and grew vigorously. Last Tuesday was a beehive of activity when the women gardeners, herb group, and a bus load of students from the Metro Early College High School, a STEM school located on Kenny Road near OSU, arrived to weed, mulch and remove invasive species. Their summer classes are focusing on solutions to alleviate world hunger, and as the school believes in getting kids outside, they came to volunteer and take a tour to see how sustainable agriculture fits into the picture.

It was such a pleasure to see a group of kids laughing and chattering as they made their way to the fields and woods, and the bonus was that there were no cell phones in sight! We are fortunate to have so many volunteers of widely differing ages who are willing to come out and keep everything in order. This allows our programming to continue as if a fairy has come in the night and provided the beautiful environment.

The small greenhouse attached to the Education Center is looking extremely spiffy with new beds created using locus boards, and the addition of attractive rows of adjustable shade blinds. The ability to control the sunlight will be a big plus when we start seedlings on the benches or plant in the beds. The blinds and installation, along with the shade cover over the patio immediately outside the greenhouse, were a very generous donation by LeVaque, a company once owned by a Stratford farmhand.

There is plenty of color in the fields due to the variety of crops grown for grazing, hay, feed grain, pollinators, and even deer deterrents like sorghum surrounding the corn. The red and white clover stands out in the green hayfields, and the golden wheat and white buckwheat contrast with the still-green oats. The blackberry bushes are laden with fat sweet berries. In another few weeks, the thorn-less berries will be ripe. By mid- August the sunflowers and more buckwheat will add their color to the landscape, along with the ripening tomatoes and peppers.

The Tuesday farmhands have recovered from an attack of chiggers or maybe no-see-ums! They encountered them in the machine shed, when they leaned against some totes containing two-year-old spelt seed, whilst fixing fishing poles. When the spelt was harvested, along with the ragweed flourishing in the field, the ragweed pods introduced moisture into the spelt. This necessitated dumping the spelt and pods on tarps on the floor, turning it periodically, and allowing it to air dry before bagging. During the process chiggers ended up in the totes!

At first the men were not aware of the bites from the young juvenile mites, but by the next day they had broken out. They quickly realized they were not alone in their suffering, and worked out the cause, one was most relieved he was not suffering from shingles! The old spelt is now on the compost pile, and the men have relocated far from any totes.

The farmhands who ventured out on the pond, in the new flat boat, have been using a tool to drag the bottom and cut the weed. The weed can be brought ashore and dried. It becomes copper colored, and when utilized as mulch has resulted in noticeably more vigorous, healthy plants.

Despite having drained and deepened the sides of the pond the cattails have taken hold again. Plans are afoot for an afternoon of pulling from the boat or in the water, which last happened eight years ago. It was a great experience to be up to our necks in cool water under a hot sun, hauling on a stem and throwing it onto the bank to open the pond for marine life.

With the farm “humming” we hope you will come out this summer and enjoy it. The Photography Contest for Kids aged 6-17, to capture what coming to Stratford means to them, continues through August 25. Details can be found on our web site. Book Talks on the fourth Friday from 6:30 to 8 pm. is ongoing. It costs \$10 per year and no reservations are necessary. Family Story Time on the Farm happens from 10 – 11 am. the second Tuesday of the month at a cost of \$5 per family paid on arrival.

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