



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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SWEET BESSIE LOU SURPRISES STRATFORD WITH A HEIFER CALF

The last day of August proved a fine time to walk the farm at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. After the noise and excitement of a full schedule of farm camps, the most noticeable sounds that day were generated by insects, crickets and birds. People talk about enjoying “eye candy” when shopping, and the walk provided enough candy to fill all the senses.

It is not necessary to know the botanical names of everything, that is only a very small part of our relationship with nature, but it is advisable to follow the advice of the poem “Leisure” by William Davies: “What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.....” When we stop and observe we can see for ourselves how farmer, crops, flowers, insects, indeed everything works together to sustain this planet, and if we want to know more we can easily find out.

The first stop was the Giving Garden, to admire a new sign beside the smiling sunflowers, awash in butterflies and bees extracting pollen and nectar. Delaware County Habitat for Humanity donated the untreated cedar wood for the sign and Executive Director Harry Pape, and his friend, Rob Ford, built a wooden canvas and frame supported by two legs. Lynda Elias, a local retired art teacher and mixed media artist, along with her friend Virginia Corwin, shared their expertise and materials, and our campers, aged nine through twelve, with the support of volunteers, created a mosaic on the canvas.

The campers glued small pieces of clear glass to outline the words “Giving Garden” and outlined Lynda’s vegetable drawings. They added pieces of broken, colorful crockery to “paint” the picture. A coating of grout between all the pieces completed the sign. It is as eye catching as a similar sign created in the Children’s Garden, and Lynda’s work on the outside rear wall of downtown Delaware’s Beehive bookstore. Thanks everyone!

Continuing along the grassy lane beside the north pasture it was easy to see corn growing inside the wire fence. The ears are filling out nicely after a late planting. On the east side of the field the animals have been removed to allow grass to grow back in time for our Harvest Fair on Saturday, September 24. Then the sound of children experiencing down-home country fun will once again blend with the songs of the birds.

On the other side of the lane the spelt had been gathered in, with a respectable 60 bushels to the acre. The combine's earlier radiator woes had been resolved for the thankfully low sum of forty-five dollars. It was an unusual harvest, as it was necessary to run the combine through the field to take off the tall ragweed heads and dispose of them. Then the spelt was combined and put in a couple of wagons, where it was easier to stir and blow with fans to dry, before storing for the winter. The spelt stalks make good straw, and along with an acre of rye straw from field 4, there is now enough for bedding.

My walk took me to the freshly-filled clear pond, where one is tempted to swim in cattail-free water, and onwards past the waving Indian grass and short sunflowers in the prairie, to field 6. Here the cattle were gathered near the water trough. The bothersome flies of mid summer were much less of a problem, judging by the occasional swing of their tails. The bull had moved to his permanent home and we have not observed any signs that the cows are still open. That is, all except Sweet Bessie Lou, a Red Devon beef cow.

Bessie surprised us by dropping a heifer calf on August 8. Assistant Farmer Gabe Ross thought he saw a dark Shetland sheep curled up in the grass while mowing, and went over to investigate. He found a 90-pound calf, which we had given up on ever becoming a reality. Bessie and "Katie" were moved to the barn and their own fenced area to bond, and were recently re-introduced to the herd. No wonder we could never be sure Bessie was pregnant; after the birth she was still a magnificent size and in top show condition.

Finally I reached the barn, where there are four less kids and six less lambs, all of whom were delivered to the processors in August. It has been a good grass pasture season and they finished out nicely. Housed in the barn is our 185-pound Tunis ram eagerly waiting in the wings, so to speak, to mate with the ewes. When Farmer Jeff Dickinson entered his stall and turned his back on him to place feed in the trough, he charged and knocked him over. Evidently the ram sees Farmer Jeff as a challenge to his ramhood, although such behavior is not usually seen in the Tunis breed. Fortunately, he hasn't much longer to wait before he will join the ewes in the pasture and produce early February lambs.

This month our farm and nature guides return to share the farm and woodlands with school children on their field trips. Sunship Earth, our 5th grade week-long science program, offered through Thanksgiving, kicks off for the second year. Harvest Fair is scheduled for Saturday, September 24 from 10-4 pm. at a cost of \$6/adult and \$4/child ages 2-12. The Fair offers an opportunity for everyone to come out to the farm. A live auction, raffle, old-fashioned games, puppet show, music, kites, horse-drawn wagon rides, animals and home-grown food ensure a good time for young and young-at-heart!

"Farm Connection" is a monthly article connecting city folk to life on the Stratford Ecological Center farm. It is published on the first Saturday of the month on the farm and garden page of *The Delaware Gazette*.

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