



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

## Farm Connection

by

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Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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### **SUMMER TIME AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER**

On a farm one is always conscious of the weather and its effect on daily life. Here at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road we have been fortunate to experience some cooling breezes during the blisteringly hot days of the past month. They are much appreciated by those weeding, but not much help to the women planting in the greenhouse despite the rolled-up sides.

Those occasional breezes kept the farm hands going as they strove, with the help of a tractor, to pull out the last of the fencing around the orchard. On the north side the remaining healthy arborvitaes will be trimmed before the erection of a new wire fence. They provide protection from the wind and predators, who all too often take an interest in our chickens housed in the corner.

During the last week of June, first-cut haying finally occurred in fields 4,5, 8 & 9. So far, we have 950 bales. Although the number is down on previous years, it was a pleasant surprise to see how much they filled the east and west corners of the hayloft.

The old combine successfully harvested the spelt over the July 7 weekend. It always heats up in warm weather, so it is a slow process for Farmer Jeff. This year one of the wider belts caused concern for failure as it had a large notch in it. Replacement is problematic due to age and cost. We may be better off buying in spelt for feed and growing spelt to bale for bedding.

The oats have been baled for hay. The corn in field 1 is looking good after rotary hoeing by a farm hand attempting the task for the first time, and Farmer Jeff's hilling of the soil around the plants. The rotary hoe is the most difficult piece of machinery to use. The hoe is pulled behind the tractor eliminating any weeds between the corn, four rows at a time. However, if not set up accurately and not monitored properly it can wipe out a row of corn! As we do not apply herbicides, timely multi-cultivation eliminates the weeds.

Pastures and lawns are beginning to brown, despite the continuous downpours in May and June. The underlying soil has become more compacted due to the deluges, and subsequent rains run off and the soils dry more quickly. A long soaking overnight rain is badly needed.

We are very pleased with the solar panels on the roof of the barn and machine shed. Our last two electric bills have been close to zero, and we have 3,300 KWH in credit for winter. We had a great response by many people to cover the expense of the panels and installation, but we still need \$7,000 to meet our \$115,000 goal.

This year we had twenty-eight 13 & 14 years old Junior Camp Counselors. Many had attended farm camp before ageing out at 12. They really wanted to remain a part and share their knowledge. This year's focus is on soil, sunlight, water, air and earth. The campers are "required" to explore, observe, play, listen, sing, laugh, dance, create, try new things and ask questions. It makes one want to be a camper.

Councilors Audrey, Camille and Maya took time from their lunch to share a continuing favorite activity of the 6-8 years old campers, magic spot in the woods. Each child pulls down a veil of silence and sits for 5 minutes to discover and develop their senses and shares the experiences. For the next forty-five minutes they create and imagine at will, including building forts. In a world of schedules this is heaven for the kids.

One Thursday a group of 9-12 years old campers, along with Education Director April Hoy, led two nanny goats through the woods to the home of Penny, a Stratford Volunteer who lives on Bunty Station Road. The idea was to introduce them to Sasha, a miniature horse, to replace her companion Mocha a donkey, who was recently sold for breeding. Sasha and Mocha were star attractions at our annual Harvest Fair and Mocha will be missed. However, Sasha was happy being an only horse and went berserk when she met the goats. She bucked and chased them around and around the coral until they broke through the fence and escaped into the woods. One was found and the other escaped for five days! Maria, wearing a purple collar, crossed Bunty Station and found a wonderful refuge in a deserted barn, where she had plenty of grass and hay. Eventually neighbors spotted her and checked with Penny to find the owner. Stratford interns Brooke and Paige collected Maria and walked her back, and luckily, she seemed as happy as we were to have her home.

There is always room at Stratford to find your own magic spot, and we hope you will come out and pull down your own veil and enjoy the downtime.

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