



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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THE GOVERNOR AND HIS FAMILY DISCOVER STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road is a magical 236-acre educational farm and nature preserve to many children and adults. The beauty of the approach on the lane, under an archway of branches, immediately slows us down and our daily concerns invariably evaporate, allowing us to embrace whatever lies ahead.

A particularly magical day, and a first for Stratford since its incorporation twenty-nine years ago, happened recently on October 21. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, his wife Fran, and three of their grandchildren arrived for a family visit, along with the Ohio Director of Agriculture, Dorothy Pelanda, and Agriculture Department staff responsible for developing children's initiatives.

As is common at Stratford, activities revolved around the grandchildren as we strolled through the gardens, barn, fields of livestock, and out to the pond and prairie. They were a delight in their enthusiasm and willingness to partake in activities.

One such activity was a 5th Grade science experiment taking place beside the pond. The purpose of "Catch the Rays" is to compare the sun's energy needed to produce an herbivorous versus a carnivorous diet. A bright yellow garbage can full of water represented the sun. After much toing and froing with buckets of water, and measuring water levels with a graded stick, it was evident that it took a lot less energy to produce a peanut butter sandwich than a hamburger.

Next was a visit to the beehives, led by our resident beekeeper, where he invited the children to poke their fingers into a comb of honey. Immediately a little voice piped up "I don't like honey" causing guffaws of laughter. As our mode of operation is to encourage children to try something new and discover that farm-fresh food tastes much better, I feel sure he eventually tried it.

The talk of food pointed us in the direction of a home-raised beef stew and apple pie lunch, and the children raced along paths through the head-high grasses in the prairie. Governor DeWine liked the idea of paths and plans to create them in their own family's prairie. The grandkids loved their cheese pizza, and happily departed carrying a gift bag of candy bars tied to a pumpkin. All agreed it was a wonderful visit!

Over one hundred people attended the October 20 Fall Friends Reception when the trees were at their peak. Food always plays a large part in the Reception and the Stratford Herb Group was asked for the first time to use their skills to create herb-flavored snacks and teas. They rose to the occasion and guests very much enjoyed sampling something “new.”

We were overrun with roosters this year after many of our eggs, incubated in the spring, turned out to be males so twenty-two roosters plus some older hens were shipped off to Spring Maple Processing in Shiloh, Ohio, and now reside in our freezer.

A lot of corn in Ohio was planted late or re-planted due to the excessively wet spring. Harvest has been pushed back to allow time for the corn to reach a desirable dryness. Our corn in field 3 is still soft, field 7 was forecast to be ready by next week. However, with the first significant snow fall on November 11 moisture readings and the state of the ground will be a big factor in deciding when to harvest.

The cattle have been allowed to graze over three fields, totaling 15 acres, to find enough grazing. Farmer Jeff hopes to make up for a lack of pasture by allowing the cattle to glean in field 7 after corn harvest.

Before the snow the sheep, goats and llama were encouraged to stay out during the day. Their needs were apparently satisfied as they did not come back to the barn for hay until evening. They received a couple bales and did not want more for breakfast before leaving the barn. It is a continuing balancing act to keep all the animals properly nourished.

Fall school tours ended last week. The Thursday tour weather was a mixture of showers and a short snow when the children shouted in excitement. The tours present a reason to be outside, and providing one has adequate clothing it is exhilarating to experience different weather conditions, even wading in the stream in the rain!

Stratford is open in the winter and offers an opportunity to see the bare bones of the woods and fields at a more relaxed pace. Please check our website for Holiday and Saturday closings. We wish you a very Happy Thankful Thanksgiving.

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