



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Looking back over the year at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road there have been many great moments. One, however, continues to stand out: the visit by Gov. DeWine, his wife Fran, their three grandchildren, and Ohio Department of Agriculture staff in October.

The ODA Director, Dorothy Pelanda, became aware of Stratford at a Meet and Greet in Sunbury soon after she assumed the position. She accepted our invitation to visit and immediately suggested bringing Mrs. DeWine. The rest is history. Presently, Farmer Jeff is helping Director Pelanda in her hope that another ecological farm could be created in the Columbus area. As we are somewhat limited in our growth on Liberty Road, we would love to see many more "Stratford's" in the State.

This week snow is lightly covering our fields and as many outside jobs as possible have been completed before the Holidays and the January chill sets in.

Farmer Jeff is happy with the nurse crop of rye poking through the snow in the south end of field 1 and the east end of the North Pasture. He is still looking for signs of the garlic planted by visiting school children in field 3. If by chance they were planted upside down, they will turn and grow up but may take a little longer! The corn yield in field 7 was disappointing and field 3 remains to be harvested.

The renovated pond is looking more respectable now water levels have increased. The grass around it has established well and the area will be perfect for spring activities. It will be interesting to see how much the mounds of re-located pond-earth and cattails in field 6 break down this winter, and when we can start spreading the compost on wet spots in field 6 and 7.

There are still a couple of fields for grazing. We needed more hay and due to the high price of round bales we purchased 64 regular bales, ordered another 200 for delivery, and will need another 100. This will bring our total hay supplies to 1,500 bales, which will allow us to squeak by until the spring.

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The big greenhouse is buttoned down as the farmhands have sealed the bottom of the plastic sheeting and the sides can no longer be rolled up to their summer position. The winter vegetables are growing steadily and barring a real dip in temperature there will be plenty of spinach, collards, swiss chard, lettuce and cilantro for u-pick in early January.

Firewood collection and splitting for use in maple sugaring in February will continue as weather permits. There is plenty down in the woods, but not all trees are equal in their burn time and heat generation. We want good hard wood that will burn slowly and will produce a high BTU, as the syrup needs to reach 219F in 6-8 hours prior to bottling.

The supply of eggs has diminished to 1-2 dozen per day, as our one hundred hens adapt to less daylight and their new bunk mates for the winter. The spring-born hens were removed from the Paw Paw yard and now reside with the older hens in the Orchard. Only those chicks born at the Delaware County Fair in September and one beat-up hen from the Orchard remain in the Paw Paw.

The extremely wet weather through early summer and then the long dry spell has not been good for producing nutritious grass, particularly the levels of selenium, for our livestock. This was evident in some of our goat kids this year, and in a Red Devon bull calf born on December 13. His muscles were weak, and he had problems balancing. Farmer Jeff calculated a dose of selenium and it did the trick. Fortunately, a heifer calf born November 23 did not show any signs. She was four-year-old Sock's first calf. Sock's was our Matriarch Sugar's last calf, and we plan to keep her calf to further maintain the blood line.

We will be closed over the holidays until Monday, January 6. We wish you a Happy Holiday and all the best for the New Year. Please come and visit in 2020 but don't make it a New Year's Resolution as everyone knows they are never kept!

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