



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

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## Farm Connection

by Pauline Scott

Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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### **ACTIVITIES CONTINUE ON-LINE AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER**

As of last Monday, March 16, Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road closed to the public in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and consistent with Ohio Governor DeWine's closure of all K-12 schools. This week would have marked the beginning of our spring farm and nature tours for school children from Delaware and Franklin County, as well as the final 2-day visits for those 5<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in the Messages from the Earth science program.

We are monitoring the situation very closely and plan to welcome everyone back as soon as it is prudent and in everyone's best interest. Meanwhile, we plan to keep you up to date with life on the farm through Facebook Live with a virtual daily field trip. On our website our Education Director plans to create a list of backyard/outdoor activities for children and families; and this column will continue to appear on the third Saturday of the month.

I must swallow my words from last month's Farm Connection when I said Pumpkin is the only cow of five left to calve and she is unlikely to be in calf. She gave birth to a slender brown and white bull calf during the night of February 17! It took considerable effort that damp grey afternoon to bring Pumpkin and her newborn from the Corral into a pen in the barn.

The first step was to bring Legend the buck, young long-eared buck Dumbo, and Sir Patrick the ram, who were by then separated from the nanny goats and ewes, from the back yard into a small pen. The next step was forking straw on top of the mud in the gateway between the Corral and Backyard to aid the ewes as they passed through on route to their pen. Finally, it was time to separate Pumpkin and her calf from the other cattle and shoo them across the mud, which almost reached the tops of our boots making footing exceedingly tenuous. Pumpkin did not exactly cooperate but somehow both arrived at the barn door and the calf led the way down the wide aisle to her new

home. Minutes later Pumpkin was pulling out hay from the crib and the calf lay at her feet in a warm bed of straw.

The anticipated arrival of the donated in-pig sow occurred on February 26. She turned out not to be the Berkshire/China Poland breed we expected but a four- way cross between a Duroc, Old Spot, Large Black and Red Waddle. She was mated with an Old Spot. She surprised us by giving birth to 11 living piglets on March 6, superb timing as it was the day before our annual Maple Sugar Breakfast with 500 guests who love to see baby animals. It does not take too much imagination to visualize the variety of colors of these delightful newborns or you may have seen their photograph in the March 10 Delaware Gazette.

Our eggs were placed in the library incubator in late February, and on March 12 the first chick hatched and was moved to the baby chick house. Another egg took its spot so there will be continuous hatching. The interns had also purchased six baby chicks from Tractor Supply in time for the Breakfast and their cheeps filled the air as they scurried in and out of a heated bridge-like structure in the house.

Usually our first lamb appears immediately before Maple Sugar Breakfast Day, but this year it arrived on March 13. Albeit a little later than expected it proved Rusty the Ram had done his job. With about nineteen ewes still to lamb there is a chance we will be lambing into May.

The atmosphere at the Breakfast was relaxed and happy with chatter so constant it was hard to share messages with the crowd. Many of the volunteers have become pros in their various posts and we are grateful for their dedication and enthusiasm.

This year's maple syrup season has been our best with production topping 45 gallons from approximately 2200 gallons of sap. The season ended as the chorus frogs emitted their comb-like calls this past weekend. It turned out the farmhands increased the number of trees tapped because additional buckets were discovered around the farm. But the increased supply caused some burn out for the farmhands as it takes a lot of hours to both cook and interpret for visiting groups. There has been talk that next year some of those buckets may disappear!

In the weeks to come the staff and interns will tend the big greenhouse, continue to start seeds in the small greenhouse, distribute excess eggs and greens, tend to the needs of the animals, prune the apple trees, prepare planting beds and continue to

finalize the many plans they have for the coming year. We hope you and your families stay well and can keep up with us through one of our medias, as we weather these very unusual times.

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