



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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WHO KNEW WHAT VOLUNTEERS WOULD MISS AT STRATFORD?

To ensure everyone's safety Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road remains closed to the public and most of its volunteers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A decision to cancel the children's summer farm camps was made in early May. The camps are an annual highlight and will be sorely missed.

There are plans afoot that would allow the farmhands, gardeners, and other specialized volunteers an opportunity to accomplish tasks on their own in order to maintain the farm. At the same time, virtual experiences on the farm are being developed for adults and children so everyone can stay connected.

As we hunker down volunteers are finding they miss many things at Stratford and shared them with me. After months of comparative isolation, the stimulating chatter and laughter over lunch with the Tuesday gardeners is greatly missed. Likewise, for the Tuesday farmhands, who usually fill the kitchen tables to capacity as they receive instructions for the day.

One volunteer shared she misses tucking away her cares and woes and replacing them with beauty and joy and carefreeness during her drive through the wooded Nature Preserve. Another said she misses the acres of open space, especially when emerging from the drive into the fields and the immense stretch of open space which she finds both stunning and humbling.

Volunteers miss the smell of the farm first thing in the morning and seeing the sunrise through the mist on the pond. Those incredibly flavorsome greens topped with slices of fresh hard-boiled eggs. The farm dog Buddy. The animals and their part in teaching children where and how their food is produced. The standing still and watching the kids discover happiness in the simple joys of a rock, a flower, a splash or even a dead bug.

They miss the staff, who not only care deeply about Stratford's purpose of sharing and appreciating the land but extend their care to all volunteers. Their fellow tour guides with their smiles and helpful nudges during a difficult day. All the working minds generating new ideas, facing new challenges, forever mindful of founder Gale Warner's Legacy.

Many volunteers think of Stratford as a home away from home and the folks there as their family, and they hope to be back at Stratford whenever we can get-up-and-go again.

Meanwhile, work on the farm continues. The sheep and llama shearing went well on a sunny Saturday at the end of April. Father/Son team Bob and Justin Taylor brought their mobile unit and parked outside the barn. Al Blythe, a volunteer, brought his own sheep and in return generously donated their fleeces weighing a total of 90 lbs. We

sold them to a local spinner for \$500. Our own wool will go to market. The sheep were checked for signs of anemia as part of our parasite management plan. Those found to be anemic were treated during a hoof trimming on May 8.

Al Blythe not only raises sheep, he was instrumental in the Gosnell Way Boardwalk, is a member of the new Apiary Committee, and he recently finished the cabinets in the Stratford kitchen. The effect is very pleasing, and we are thankful to Board Chairman Clyde Gosnell and Al for their spiffing up efforts.

Olivia Pflaumer, an Agriculture Intern last summer and a Senior in Ag. Education at OSU this fall, was hired to co-ordinate Stratford's Apiary program, and a Beginning Farmer summer program for adults and children. She is well versed in agriculture through her family homesteading, and particularly bees, due to her research in the FFA Agri-Science program. Timing was good as she caught and rehoused one of our own swarms and split another hive. Welcome back Olivia.

The last lamb was born on April 12 to a first-time mother. She was very scared and kicked the lamb out of the pen. Farmer Jeff wrestled with her in order to ensure the lamb suckled some of the colostrum and is now bottle feeding him. One more goat kid was born and is thriving, while twin kids were breech and sadly stillborn. The livestock have plenty of grazing, and since mid-March is the best seen ever by Farmer Jeff.

It is now too late to plant oats for hay, so rye with an orchard/alfalfa mix will take its place. Corn stalk bales arrived to mulch the field asparagus and black berries, and later the field vegetables, so we can preserve our dwindling straw supplies. The apple trees were in full bloom two weeks ago and hopefully the fruit set before the temperatures dropped to 27F on May 8. The beds in the Children's Garden have been weeded but were too wet to till, a four-inch covering of compost was added and they are now ready for planting. The wild hyacinths, our flagship wildflower, started to bloom last week. Nature is continuing in all its glory and we hope you can discover its beauty in your yard and neighborhood parks.

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