



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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FARM SCHOOL PROGRAM AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

At present Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road is not open to the public, but there is every hope that from September 1st school-age children will again be able to spend a day on the farm. We have been a hands-on out-of-doors teaching center for thirty years, but this fall we anticipate our usual farm and nature school tours and our 5th grade Science Program will be cancelled due to the pandemic. However, April Hoy, our Education Director, and Emily Rudy, our Volunteer Program Director and former teacher, have created and will lead a new Stratford Farm School program. Learning will take place outside where nature is the classroom and the teacher.

The Farm School will support children, especially those who do not learn well on-line or in a traditional school setting, to meet their grade-level Ohio academic standards for science. It will be offered Tuesday through Thursday from 9-3 pm. at a cost of \$65/day. There is a limit of 8 students per day and each student may attend only one day. Children aged 6-8 will attend in the first few weeks, followed by those 9-12, with more opportunities for both later, and finally 13-17-year-old for three days in mid-November. We invite parents to sign up on our website. Everyone is excited about this new opportunity which could remain a fixture.

Growing conditions on the farm and in the gardens have continued to be good. This means of course that weeds need pulling and, in some instances the lush growth cut back. The women garden team became concerned about how to trim the edibles planted in the two rain gardens, and sought advice from Bob Harter, our knowledgeable plantsman. Bob advised them to "go for it" as it could not hurt anything except the elderberries. So, they severely cut back and mulched, and the plants look much happier.

Triticale, a new addition to our list of annual pasture grasses, was planted in field 1 in the spring. It is a hybrid cross between nutritious wheat and hardy rye. At the same time Farmer Jeff planted a rich mixture of perennial alfalfa, red and white clover, Timothy and Orchard grass, and later annual buckwheat. Presently the buckwheat is a sea of white blossoms attracting numerous pollinators and after they fade the crop will be harvested for hay.

Further down the lane, beyond the laden apple trees in the orchard, the Corral field is a picture of knee-high Queen Ann's lace, red clover and blue Chicory. Chicory is often thought of as a roadside weed, but farmers are now using it for livestock grazing in conjunction with other grasses, due to its usefulness in reducing intestinal worms. Its roots have long been recognized as a substitute or addition to coffee.

The last day of July was the final day at Stratford for our four women Education interns. We gratefully thank and wish them well. We hope they left on a high after being part of

the hay crew who brought in 430 bales from fields 1,2,3,4 & 5, and almost filled the hayloft, making Farmer Jeff a happy man! The interns worked hard and thrived on the experience, despite initially signing on as Camp Counselors. Their summer included creating YouTube videos for kids, zooming around on the 4-wheeler as they worked the farm, helping in the gardens, preparing for the bi-weekly farm market located outside the Second Ward Community Center, and relieving Farmer Jeff of the twice daily livestock feeding.

Ten farm and nature tour guides came in on August 5 for "re-training" to learn about berry picking and how to weed, water and pick the vast quantity of vegetables for People in Need in Delaware. One reported "I am pumped and ready to roll up my sleeves and tackle those weeds."

The last five goat kids have been separated from their mothers in order to wean them, and now reside in the small fenced area beside the front lawn, where they can take advantage of shade in the Wendy house. They are still so cute. In time they will be reunited with the nannies, although the three boys are scheduled to go to market in September.

There is no plan yet to market the fattening lambs, and it was a pleasure to see them jostling with the ewes as they trooped out of the barn one late afternoon and made their way to the plentiful pasture.

Tansy our sow, and her five piglets have access to the Back Yard. She now looks like a domesticated sow, rather than a shaggy feral, as her coat has become smooth and shiny after rooting for grubs. Andres, our young intern, hopped nimbly over the gate and walked beside her to get to the hay loft, and she never batted an eyelid. If that had been Farmer Jeff, whom the sow identifies with Buddy the dog and dislikes, it would have been a quite different story! For that reason, she may soon be moving to another home.

If you missed the live weekly Beginning Farmers YouTube videos you can still pick them up on YouTube or our website. Even if you are not planning on becoming a farmer, they provide an excellent opportunity to connect with Stratford. Summer is going all too fast, and we hope you can relax and enjoy the rest of the season before it is time to rake the leaves. Stay Safe.

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