



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

## Farm Connection

by Pauline Scott

Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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### **SEASONAL WORK IN HAND AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER**

We are still unable to open our gates as widely as we would like at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, as we continue to take precautions to keep everyone safe.

For the most part Farm School has gone ahead as planned, with a total of 189 children attending this new offering. The positive reaction ensures it will continue during our maple sugar season, and into spring and fall next year.

Despite rationing volunteers throughout the week, we have adapted, and the seasonal work has been steadily accomplished. On November 3, the one-row corn harvester was overhauled. Farmhand Pete was able to successfully harvest the corn in fields 2 & 4, resulting in a yield sufficient to see us through the winter. The mounds of composting cattails in field 6 were patiently moved and spread over the uneven ground, allowing triticale to be planted for grazing next spring.

The Master Gardeners of Delaware County started a Native Plant Propagation Project a few years ago. The demand for plants, offered at their annual sale at the fairgrounds in 2019, was huge. The project has grown and expanded to five working groups responsible for seed starting, caring for over-winter holding beds, and growing plants for future division in their own back yards.

We were approached by them in early summer to provide space in the Children's Garden for two beds to hold transplants from member gardens. We were pleased to provide another venue where visitors could recognize and learn about natives. The plants were tucked in and watered faithfully during our dry fall. Each plant has its own identifier, including what insects it attracts. I liked the added tidbit that some are definitely resistant to deer and rabbit attacks.

Chicken has been the buzz word this month. The 75 chickens in the orchard have been molting and laying less eggs and adjusting to the shorter days. A three by five recycled brick patio was laid by farmhands Gary and Kristen at the entrance to the Paw Paw coop, where wet mud was proving a challenge to entry. One side of the coop has been commandeered by the broody hen and her two off-spring, who at this stage in their young lives have a distinct resemblance to fuzzy pigeons. The other contains 10 female chicks of various sizes and colors, purchased on the spur of the moment to brighten our lives. A few moments of speculation as to their breed quickly brings a welcome smile.

The crème de la crème is our newly constructed portable chicken coop or chicken tractor. It has been on the cards for longer than I have volunteered at Stratford, at least fourteen years. It was built by farmhands Dan and Jim from a decommissioned wooden free-standing hay bunk. It stands on skids and will be moved into the fields to allow the chickens to forage in new areas.

There are five nesting boxes along one side, with outside access for egg collection. A number of roosting branches span the width of the coop. A solar operated door will ensure the chickens are safely closed in at night. The coop will be in operation next spring, when the chickens will have to learn the routine in order not to spend the night outside!

Our rams, pensioner Rusty and young St. Patrick, have spent the summer with the ewes and breeding likely started in September. Likewise, with our buck Legend and the nanny goats. Lambs and kids can be expected in late January and early February. The cattle are looking fit and well in the fields. Pumpkin, the only Jersey cow, is her usual rotund self and continues to have a full udder as her nine-month bull calf has yet to be weaned.

Details of our third sale of maple syrup, honey, meats, soap, and notecards will soon be posted on our monthly e-update, website, and social media. Christmas gift bags containing maple syrup, decorative bottles of honey, and notecards will be available by pre-order for \$25 and \$50 each, with meats, etc. purchased on site. We wish you a Happy Thanksgiving despite the difficult logistics.

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