



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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FARMHANDS TURN THEIR HANDS TO INSIDE WORK

The farmhands at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road did not take their usual two-week holiday over Christmas and New Year, as help was needed inside and out. The office had not been painted in thirty years and the carpets needed cleaning. The Christmas break provided the perfect time to unplug the technology and have farmhands move everything into the Big Room.

After the move farmhand Paul showed up with drop cloths, paint brushes and spackle. He and Farmer Jeff prepared the walls and Paul spent a day painting them. The carpet was cleaned. The furniture was moved back on January 5, with the "clutter" left behind after Jeff proclaimed only necessities were to be brought back! Jeff now has the window corner office space, allowing April, the Education Director and Emily, the Volunteer Coordinator to sit next to each other and discuss their work without talking over his head! The attractive results confirmed it was well worth everyone's effort and time. Thank you.

On January 6, the portable chicken coop was moved from the lane into the Children's Garden to re-house our chickens. In order to acclimate the 75 from the orchard, and the 12 young birds and 1 mother from the Paw Paw run, they were shut in their new abode together for 24 hours. Fortunately, there was no fighting, otherwise the 13 would have been returned to the Paw Paw coop, without access to the run as the grass is recuperating. The 12 youngsters, who once looked like ugly ducklings, have developed into dazzling teenagers. The garden gates and greenhouse walls were secured, and the chickens have learned to exit the coop and walk down the ramp to browse.

A thick layer of compost from the South Pasture has been added to the vegetable beds in the Children's Garden and stockpiled by the fence behind the greenhouse for use when needed to enhance the greenhouse beds. The winter barn mucking out happened over the holidays, and will again at the end of January, to ensure clean pens in time for the arrival of our lambs and kids in early February.

Once released into the back yard, the five hogs devoured the groundhog radish leaves and most of the roots in a record-breaking ten days. Any remaining roots will be left undisturbed to decompose until spring cultivation.

On the edge of the wood between the parking lot and the farmhouse, the last of the potted tree saplings have been planted. They include dogwoods, redbuds, and a small Midwest native Nannyberry *Viburnum*, which turns maroon-red in the fall and bears blue black berries. They will have more chance of survival compared to planting in the spring and facing a hot, dry summer. A few Paw Paws were added to the Paw Paw grove on a slope at the corner of the Hush and Cemetery trails. Their delicious banana-like fruit are

great to eat if one can harvest them before the birds, foxes, racoons, squirrels and opossums!

We are planning on tapping 150-180 maple sugar trees this year and opening the sugar shack for maple syrup production. The operation has been down-sized due to the pandemic, but we will still offer small group tours in February. Please keep your eye on our website for details.

In Early January one of our testier cows, five-years-old Socks, left the farm for the processor. She was the last calf of our matriarch Sugar. Socks gave birth to her first calf, a heifer, in November 2019, and we have retained her in order to maintain the breeding line. The beef will be available for purchase, along with our pork and nitrate-free uncured bacon, during the next maple syrup and honey sale soon to be announced.

In our December e-update we shared details of the Ben Sippel Growing Forward Scholarship created by supporters of Stratford Ecological Center, in gratitude for an amazing friend who passed away in July. Ben was an agriculture apprentice at Stratford, and afterwards became a vital part in growing our former Community Supported Agriculture Program. He went on to operate the program from his own farm, and along the way increased many people's awareness of agriculture. The scholarship will support future Agriculture Apprentices at Stratford. Should you wish to support an aspiring farmer please visit our website for details.

Looking ahead to the new year we hope to start elementary-age Farm School again in February with small learning group tours on Fridays, and pre-school Farm School and small group tours to the Vernal Pool in March. Details will be posted, and reservations are necessary. May you find opportunities this month to wrap up and take a revitalizing walk. Please stay well.

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