



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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STRATFORD WINDS DOWN FOR THE WINTER

It has been another dry fall at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, with the first hard frost on November 11. The leaf colors have been magnificent on the drive into Stratford. The natural archway formed by the trees is a perfect passageway for birds and animals to cross roadway barriers. Farmer Jeff continues to clear leaves off the drive. After the next half inch of rain softens the gravel, he will grade the surface, and provide us with a few months of pothole-free navigation!

The invasive species are the last to lose their green coloring, allowing for easy spotting amongst the yellow and orange undergrowth. We have been very fortunate to have students from the Olentangy and North Union School Districts, international students from OSU, and students from Columbus State Community College, assist us in removing the invasives during their community service days. A master plan has been created to guide the planting of useful trees and shrubs in the open spaces, and prevent the return of undesirable plants.

In the summer Lucas Eyerman chose to earn his Eagle Scout award by replacing the cracked, breaking, and cloudy panels in the small greenhouse adjoining the education building. The young seedlings were not getting enough sunlight and were growing leggy, making it a very timely project choice. He held numerous fundraisers to pay for the project, and covered most of the \$2,000 cost. The work involved taking the frame apart, cleaning the polycarbonate glazing, putting it back together, and re-caulking. Lucas completed his commitment before leaving for college in late August. The Tuesday farmhands handled the tricky configuration of screwing the panels back onto the frame, and the result is a much brighter and warmer greenhouse that will benefit a lot of people. Many thanks to Lucas and the men.

The electric fence around the corn helped to keep out the deer, and prevent losses, but there were clear signs they had nested amongst the stalks after enjoying an early supper! We harvested 50 bushels per acre on four acres, for a total of 10,000 pounds. The yield would have been much greater if we had not experienced two unprecedented five-inch rain falls shortly after planting, which washed out seed. With no seed of our own left to plant, and organic seed expensive to buy, Farmer Jeff figured what remained would produce enough, and we did not replant.

We are using two of the three newly-sided gravity wagons to store the corn out of the weather, so there are plans to utilize the wire corn crib next to the children's garden in a different capacity. With all the past innovations at Stratford, I shall watch with interest its transformation. The corn is incorporated into our chicken and hog feed during the year, and this year's yield will result in 10 tons of the 12 tons fed annually.

This fall's four acres of spelt seed was planted at a higher density to safeguard against the much dryer soil conditions, and possible lack of germination. Spelt likes rain. It is up, with an acre in the middle of field 3, one on the east side of field 4, and two on the north end of field 6. The other arable fields have been cover-cropped in annual rye, tillage radish and winter peas. The rye can germinate utilizing only dew. The radishes are known as a mop up and nutrient cover crop. The radish's long root will soak up the extra nutrients in the soil, normally lost during the winter, and immobilize them. When the roots decompose in January they not only help to improve the soil structure, but slowly release the stored nutrient for use by the rye and winter peas. The rye and nitrogen-rich peas will be turned under in the spring, and provide nutrients for the next crop in the rotation.

The experiment of fencing off the sheep and goats in the woods was not very successful. They were not attracted to the old invasive vegetation, and were scared by the scent of nearby coyotes. We plan to try again next spring using the fresh growth as incentive to stay. Due to the proximity of Rt. 23 and our neighbors, and fears of escape, we aborted plans to put the hogs in the woods.

The hens are ensconced in the children's garden coop to allow the orchard to rest. The barn has been mucked out, with access limited until the cold weather truly arrives. The machinery has been winterized and is ready for positioning in the machine shed.

Gunther, the buck, was in the fields with the nanny goats until he started seeking more than his fair share of attention by butting one of the tour guides. He had a few days in solitary, until the end of the school group tours last week. This year's lambs have now all gone to market, along with two steers, ensuring their meat is available for the Christmas season.

We give thanks for another successful year at Stratford, and wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

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