



Farm Connection  
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**BEWARE OF THE BULL**

I had planned that the merry month of May news from Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road would be written by Farmer Jeff. I would be on vacation so it seemed the perfect opportunity for you to hear from him in person. Well, you know what they say about the best laid plans; Mother Nature intervened and we apologize there was no article last month. Farmer Jeff explained to me that “Once the weather broke (when the sun finally shone at the end of May) I didn’t come in or look back, sunrise to sunset, blew right by the date before I realized it was past!”

This is a perfect illustration of the life of a farmer, constantly at the mercy of the weather to grow our food and make a living. This year’s continual rain has been very stressful for all Ohio farmers. If they planted, they will be fortunate to see the corn “knee-high by the fourth of July.” Late planting means lower yields and higher sales price per bushel. This will be reflected in higher food costs for consumers as grain and food prices rise.

The early June sunny days allowed Stratford to cut and bale the first hay of the year and it was stored before the rains came again. The staff did well to use this window to plant the Children’s Garden with summer crops of tomatoes, peppers and squashes, as well as finally planting the cabbages and other brassicas. The school children’s early spring planting of carrots, peas and red beets, are amazingly robust and I am not sure where to place the credit!

The bright red poppies, blue larkspur and winter greens have been removed from the greenhouse. This created plenty of space for direct seeding of kale, Swiss chard, squashes and flowers, as well as tomatoes, peppers, egg and cucumber plants. It will be some time before anything is ready to pick and the greens will be missed.

For the past couple of months the animals have enjoyed the corn stalks and young rye grass in field 6. Last Monday the field was mowed and later plowed and sown with oats for high protein hay. Presently, the animals are in field 7. We missed the window of opportunity to rotary hoe between the rows of barley, to remove weeds in their tiny white root stage, and the common ragweed has flourished. But the animals don’t mind and are thriving on the unexpected treat. The barley in field 1 was cut for hay after the ragweed clogged the combine. Not a good year for barley.

It is fortunate field 7 has a strong fence as we now have a Red Devon/Hereford bull on the farm. He is on loan from dairy farmer, John Van Gundy, for 45 to 60 days, until delivery to his new Delaware County home. We named him Junior. He had been in a pen since last February and was a handful to manage upon his arrival at Stratford.

Junior is considered a "Mop-up" bull. It is his job to mate with our Red Devon/Hereford, Annie, as she is disappointingly "open," and serve our Jersey cows, Molasses and Sugar. Both calved last fall and attempts at artificial insemination have failed. Jersey cows are very subtle in their signs of breeding which makes it difficult to catch them in heat. Meanwhile, Sugar's calf Pumpkin has been weaned and is bawling in the barn. Keeping her company, and away from any power play with the bull, are the three yearling Jersey steers.

Roxy, our Tamworth pig, is showing signs of farrowing, as her mammary gland has filled up. The camp children are watching her closely, and it would be a rare treat to observe the birth of as many as 15 beautiful, brown piglets. The two feeder babes are doing well with the addition of goat's milk. Jessie, the brown Shetland sheep and her twin kids, regular houdinis, have been relegated to the more secure Children's Garden hen yard.

The orchard hens now have a freshly-cleaned hen house, thanks to the efforts of middle-school students from the OWJL (Ohio Wesleyan/Junior League of Columbus) camp. These gifted children, from surrounding counties, stay in the dorms at OW for a week and come out daily to Stratford. Christa Hein, Stratford's Education Director, exposes them to every aspect of farm life. Farmer Jeff engaged the youngsters in rounding up forty-eight hens who had rushed through an open gate, after the week-long campers had collected the eggs. The hens were everywhere - in the greenhouse, the flower beds, and the straw-bale house.

This month a jams and jellies class on July 9, from 10-2 pm, begins our annual preserving classes. Beans, pickles and tomatoes will follow in August. Two opportunities to benefit Stratford are a raffle of two heirloom quilts, donated by Susan Logan, and "An Enchanted Evening," an elegant dinner/dance under the stars, on Saturday, July 30, from 6.30-10.30 pm. Details are in the July E-newsletter on our web site.

**"Farm Connection"** is a monthly article connecting city folk to life on the Stratford Ecological Center farm. It is published on the first Saturday of the month on the farm and garden page of *The Delaware Gazette*.

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