



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by
Pauline Scott
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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WATERMELON IS A SMART REMEDY TO REVIVE HOT HAY MAKERS

Farmer Jeff at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road was correct in his prediction that we would get a light rain over the September 8 weekend because of Hurricane Gordon. Unlike the many hard downpours, we experienced this year, the moisture had a chance to soak into the ground and help soften the hard pan two inches below the surface which has developed since May.

A second cutting of hay from fields 2, 3 and 4 were plucked off by the Tuesday farmhands after the Labor Day Holiday. Timing was great as rain started the next day. It was once again extremely hot and humid, so a break to indulge in thick wedges of thirst-quenching watermelon was the perfect antidote.

The protective annual Sorghum Sudan grass is growing well bordering the corn in field 1. The deer, who make their home in the woods, don't like to walk through it to get to the corn. Buckwheat and sunflowers are also planted there, providing nectar and aiding in soil building.

The stand of buckwheat and sunflowers in the front of field 3 is magnificent. Weather will determine whether we combine the seeds and bale the straw, or simply cut and bale for hay. Providing a couple of passes with a disk harrow are made immediately after the buckwheat has been harvested, any seed that fell to the ground will be covered and will germinate, providing us with a free crop next year!

Farmhands started picking the early heritage apples at the end of August. They are being stored in the walk-in cooler in the machine shed and will be used to make cider on the antique press during Harvest Fair and Fall school tours. Nine co-ed freshmen students from the Columbus Academy spent their Service Day on September 7 picking apples, collecting windfalls, and washing them. Judging by the chatter over the wash tubs it was a labor of love and they were enjoying themselves.

The deer have not made too great an inroad in the greenhouse and children's garden, so the Tuesday women gardeners were able to pick a hundred pounds of squash, tomatoes and lettuce for delivery to PIN in Delaware. The still-roofless greenhouse continues to need watering and the best way is slow, deep watering. It is good for the plants but evidently not so good for the waterer who was "glowing" yet reluctant to remove her ball cap and reveal "nature's" hairstyle, when she sat down for lunch on one of those hot days!

Our Guernsey cow Sassy has been too amenable, and it caused her to lose condition. She allowed her "weaned" calf from last year, this year's calf, and probably two others to suckle her. Farmer Jeff separated the older calf, who bellowed throughout the night, only to break through an electric fence to return to Sassy. He solved the problem by weaning Sassy's youngest calf, and putting all the cattle, except Sassy, in a portion of the barn with access to the fields. Sassy was happy to stay by herself during the heat in a gated barn pen and receive extra feed. However, there will come a time when she will want to go out, and Farmer Jeff will have to figure out which pasture he can afford to give up and allow her to graze by herself.

New this year at our annual Harvest Fair on Saturday, September 22 from 10-3 pm. is an invitation to bring your home-grown fruits and vegetables to display in the Education Building, and a Stratford Photography Club Exhibit which runs through October 31. This is a fun-filled day with activities including feeding the chickens, horse-drawn wagon rides, Kid's World, herb table, cider making, hiking, music, and food. The cost is \$5 per person or \$15 for a family of four, and payable on arrival.

Another possible date for your diary is the Fall Family Campfire at the pond on Friday, October 12 from 5-8 pm. It is an informal evening of exploring the farm, fishing, running through the prairie, cooking your own hotdogs and marshmallows, and singing with Alex as he plays his guitar. Reservation details can be found on our web site.

I am planning on being one of the tour guides on the Harvest wagon, and the firelighter at the Campfire, so please say Hi and don't be shy about sharing what draws you to visit Stratford.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center.

Stratford Ecological Center
3083 Liberty Road • Delaware • Ohio • 43015
740-363-2548 • info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org
www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org