



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
by
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TOUR SEASON ENDS AT STRATFORD WITH A SCRUMPTIOUS POTLUCK

The Farm and Nature Tours for school groups ended for the fall season on November 8 at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. All volunteers were invited to a potluck luncheon on that day. Fifty plus volunteers including the tour guides, the Messages Program guides who finished their fall segment this week, the women's gardening team, the farmhands, the event volunteers, and staff gathered in the Big Room. It is a great time to catch up, relax and eat well.

Stratford is renowned for their delicious, healthy potlucks but apparently last year food was a little on the scarce side! Perhaps too many desserts? Farmer Jeff took it on himself to remedy the situation by cooking plenty of home-raised bratwurst and Italian sausage. They were delicious, and so was the mass of other fabulous savories and sweets. Word must have been passed around!

Our fall education intern, Ilana, has left to complete her associate degree in sustainable agriculture. After some traveling at the end of the year she hopes to enter Ohio State's program and possibly become a teacher. Ilana has plenty of hands-on experience on farms in the US and willingly shared her in-depth knowledge. Interestingly, one of the reasons why she may opt to teach is that she found farming can be a solitary, and sometimes lonely occupation. However, she did not share those thoughts with a 1st grader, who exclaimed the minute he entered the hay loft that he wanted to be a farmer!

Our other education intern, Calysta, came to Stratford last spring, stayed on as a farm camp intern, and remained as a fall education intern. Stratford is indeed a family. Calysta's sister was an intern eight years ago when Christa Hein was Education Director. Christa left to start what has become a very successful business called "Bring the Farm to You." She loads farm animals into a trailer and takes them to schools and libraries. Calysta interviewed with Christa, and the two will work together this winter until Calysta returns to Stratford in February in time for maple sugar tours.

When the fall colors finally showed their face in the woods and farm the effect this year was mesmerizing. The trees were so beautiful. Tour guide, Kaye Cragg, led a group of children and their parents to the pond. The parents, for whom it is often their first visit to Stratford, looked across the still water and saw two brilliantly red slender trees flanking the bird blind, and reflecting in the water. They were in awe, just managing to utter the word "splendid."

Like others in Ohio we have noticed lots of acorns on the ground this year but fewer black walnuts in certain areas, especially where the sun has dried out the soil on the edge of the woods. These areas went very quickly from containing 2-3% moisture to a dry pan a few inches below the ground. The locations where the walnut trees grew in shadow remained moist, and the nuts formed well.

With early fall temperatures as much as 10 degrees above normal, and lately as low as 22F and 18 degrees below normal, no Indian summer, and four inches of rain in a short period, Farmer Jeff constantly makes changes to his plans for field work. By using a moisture meter, he was able to verify that the corn at the east end of the North Pasture had dried to a level of 14 degrees, and he harvested 60 bushels per acre. He is still waiting for the corn moisture to drop in field #1, where the deer have finally forged a path between the Sudan grass and the corn!

Last week's freezing weather allowed the farm hands to clean out the barn pens, move the manure to the field pile to decompose, and spread the pens with lime to kill parasites. After the frost the animals graze in parasite-free fields and will not contaminate the barn when they return. There is enough grazing to see us into January if conditions permit. The hay and straw supplies are plentiful.

The hens are loving being back in the orchard now the fence is complete. They are laying profusely, and their back feathers are looking a lot prettier since the number of abundant roosters were reduced and processed. A new buck is expected to join the goats after Thanksgiving; we are grateful to have him on loan from Development Council member Randee Summers.

Stratford will close for the holiday on Wednesday, November 21 and reopen on Monday, November 26, when we revert to our winter hours of 9-5 pm Monday through Friday and closed Saturday and Sunday.

We wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving.

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