



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by

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DIVERSITY AT STRATFORD KEEPS FARMER BUSY

Life on such a diverse 236-acre educational farm as The Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road is very stimulating for those involved, but this year has resulted in a very full “To Do” list for Farmer Jeff. Along with three new projects, this year’s extreme weather has necessitated much greater effort in the management of the 60 acres available for crops, hay and pasture.

As a grass-fed based farm, our animal health must be carefully monitored since poor-quality forage causes a loss of condition and an inability to fight disease. Three of our cattle went to the processor and the reduction of the number of animals in our small herd has made a huge difference in the length of time they can stay in one area and thrive. The three young calves purchased last April have remained in the barn bonding with the smaller livestock, as it has been too hot to join the older cattle.

The first of our lambs have also been delivered to the organic processor. The heat and humidity affected their weight gain and they were the lightest we ever sent. This month we are offering a discount of ten percent on both lamb and beef sales.

We donated 65 eggs to the Delaware Fair to use in an incubator exhibit; hopefully the timing worked out and some hatched this week. Eventually, we will bring the chicks back to the farm and raise them in the paw paw chicken coop which has heat lamps. This is the first time we will have raised chicks during the winter. The spring chicks are now fully grown and laying eggs.

The goat kids were separated from their mothers in order to wean them. Unlike sheep, goats do not self-wean, and as they will be mated again this fall, they need to dry off and regain their strength to nourish their new kid during gestation. A close eye is kept on their udders to make sure they don’t become engorged as this could result in mastitis. Should the udder fill, the nanny is returned to her kid who is only too happy to relieve her, but not for too long!

Incredible as it may seem with the concrete-like soil conditions, the corn is doing well with good sized ears. We still need rain to fill out the ears, and as the seed was planted after most of the rain the harvest will be a late one.

One of the new projects has been the removal of cattails and re-grading the banks around the pond. It was a poor sight, but after the removal of 50 dump truck loads of soil to a low spot in nearby field

6, followed by re-seeding and a covering of straw, it looks so much better. One sunny afternoon, standing on the new walkway on the north side of the pond, the beautiful vista of the prairie and multiple small fields surrounded by woodland was heart-warming.

Beside the pond is the second project, the new haybarn. This will be a welcome storage area and can be used in inclement weather as a shelter for our school groups and campers. The Tuesday farmhands are building the barn from scratch. On the advice of an OSU Extension Agent with expertise in pond management, solar panels will be added to the roof, and a windmill erected on the east side. They will generate electricity to aerate the pond which has become a necessity to control nutrient levels, pond weed and cattails, and allow our young visitors to spot tadpoles and to fish.

Our third big project is the new board walk to the vernal pool. It will be called the "Gosnell Way," after this year's Enchanted Evening Honoree, Board Chairman Clyde Gosnell. The path and dock have been staked out, and the foundation lumber purchased and stored in the machine shed. A volunteer used his own track bobcat to drill 60 post holes, with post setting taking place this week.

The Farm and Nature school group tours have started for the fall. The children will be able to pick apples, although they are sparser due to extensive spring rains washing away the pollen, and the pollinators seeking shelter rather than working! We have an additional apple cider press donated to us which will be helpful during Harvest Fair, scheduled for Saturday, September 28, from 10-3 pm. Cost is \$5 per person at the gate. There are still some spaces open for the Family Campfire on Friday, October 11 from 5-8 pm. Planned activities include visiting the barn, a hayride, cooking your own hotdogs, fishing, singing, a night hike and taking home a pumpkin. All event information is on our website, and we look forward to seeing you!

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