



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

---

## Farm Connection

by  
Pauline Scott  
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

Published in *The Delaware Gazette*: February 15, 2020

### A MID-WINTER WALK AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Farmers are always aware of the weather, as are volunteers at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. After ten record breaking days of continuously grey skies lasting from late January into early February, it was a pleasure to experience a sunny Sunday. Some keen gardeners even took the opportunity to spring clean their neglected vegetable beds and discover the first snowdrops and tips of daffodil shoots. By Thursday, February 6, after a night of rain, the temperature had dropped to 32F and inch-long icicles hung off the tree branches and sparkled in the sun for three days. It was magical.

This week the damp and grey have returned, but thanks to a dry day it did not hinder my farm walk last Tuesday, February 11 sharing Stratford with two retired schoolteachers hoping to volunteer.

We set off down the lane to the pond, passing the orchard chicken coop where Carol, a Tuesday farmhand, was once again busy cleaning out the coop. Some chores seem to come around very quickly and I gave thanks that the weather was no worse.

In field 3 the corn was no longer standing. On January 21 volunteers hand-picked the corn adjacent to the emerging spelt to avoid damaging the spelt should we have used the 1-row corn picker. Then Pete was able to mechanically harvest the remaining ears.

The cattle, sporting their thick brown winter coats, were clustered around a haybale in the North Pasture. With them was the "fourth" calf born since November, who arrived on January 15. Pumpkin is the only cow left and she is not likely to be in calf. One horned steer left for the processor in January and the second leaves next week; our freezers will soon be full of beef for sale.

Everywhere we walked there were muddy ruts full of water. Usually by now the ground is frozen, and the machinery can move along without digging in. Similarly, where the animals gather most often in the barnyard and backyard there was a blanket of mud.

Stratford Ecological Center  
3083 Liberty Road • Delaware • Ohio • 43015  
740-363-2548 • [info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org](mailto:info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org)  
[www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org](http://www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org)

As we passed by the pond the water looked very brown and uninviting, but it was good to note the new healthy grass flourishing around its margin. The pond's first aeration system will be installed this spring. The metal roof on the upper part of the new pond shelter, now called the Prairie Pavilion, has been installed and the attractive building is finished. It will prove useful three seasons of the year, after we install a solar panel and battery to provide electricity.

We continued walking along the edge of the woods towards the sugar shack, and the first of the white buckets hanging on maple trees came into view. The farmhands tapped 308 trees on February 4, a record, and the sap is flowing. There was a little help this year identifying the maples, as the trees tapped last year have a small orange mark painted on them!

It is heavy work carrying 5 gallons buckets from tree to tree and emptying the smaller suspended buckets into them. Once full the sap is poured into a big canister on the front of a nearby tractor for transportation to storage barrels outside the sugar shack.

Over six hundred gallons were collected on the day of our walk, and as sap only keeps five to six days the evaporator was fired up and run for at least the next six days. The farmhands process about 100 gallons of sap in an eight-hour day, producing approximately 2 gallons of maple syrup containing the required 67% syrup and 33% water.

We strolled back through the woods overlooking the ravine and the full stream. The sight caused the women to catch their breath, but little do they know the view is even better when the spring trillium bloom. We finished at the barn, where a pen will be cleaned out in preparation for lambing, and an empty pen awaits the in-pig sow. The final pig went to the processors last week. The two who left in January averaged 267.5 lbs., a very respectable weight.

Once back inside the Education building, we inspected the work being done in the kitchen before new flooring is installed. A tall cupboard was moved and in its place Clyde Gosnell, our Board Chairman, built and installed two new ones. David Hoy our Development Director acted as his right-hand man. David shared he learned the value of shims in the appropriate places to ensure the cupboard fits perfectly. The women left after purchasing honey, soap, and the last of some strongly flavored maple syrup from 2019. It was a very good walk.

One-hour Maple Sugar tours are planned for Saturday, February 22 and 29, from 10-1 pm. at a cost of \$4 per person. The annual Maple Sugar breakfast, and self-guided tour to the sugar shack and barn, takes place on Saturday, March 7 from 8-1 pm., with five hourly seating, priced at \$10/adult and \$5/child. Please register on-line for both tours and breakfast. Vernal Pool Monitoring will take place Friday, March 20, and April 3 from 6-8:30 pm at \$10/family or \$3/person with registration now necessary as the group is limited to 35. As lambs usually make their appearance during maple syrup days, we hope you can visit and witness a new birth.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Road, Delaware. She can be reached at 740 383 2548 or by email at [info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org](mailto:info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org) or website [StratfordEcologicalCenter.org](http://StratfordEcologicalCenter.org)

Stratford Ecological Center  
3083 Liberty Road • Delaware • Ohio • 43015  
740-363-2548 • [info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org](mailto:info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org)  
[www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org](http://www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org)