



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection by Pauline Scott Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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HAY BALER HICKUPS AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

After consistently dry days it was a relief to have a heavy but short rainfall on June 29 at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. It helped lower the temperature the following days. So, on July 2,

eighteen visitors from Friendship Village in Dublin experienced a comfortable four-hour tour, including a stop inside for lunch and a video of Stratford. They were all seasoned walkers and gardeners and had no trouble exploring the farm and woodlands. It was a pleasure to share information about their own farm experiences and our newer ventures, like the solar panels and the rain garden filtering the water from the roof of the big machine shed before releasing it to the stream.

Farmer Jeff began cutting the spelt and triticale for hay in fields 1 & 2 on Saturday, July 3. He waited until the spelt was in its doe stage, between milk and finish, before starting the second cutting. He was able to rake late Monday afternoon and start baling that evening. He moved from the spelt to the triticale through thick grass and the baler plugged in the worst way! Darkness had settled by the time he cleared the blockage.

On Tuesday morning a big team of volunteers, including the agriculture interns from the Methodist Theological School of Ohio, arrived to bring in the bales. Farmer Jeff was out early baling, only to find the knots on the baler twine were not holding. Yet another repair was made to our old machine. The saga continued with the string cutting improperly, which requires sharpening the knife. It takes skill to do it right, but the baler gave no further trouble!

Best of all the 2955 John Deere tractor was returned that very morning after major clutch work. With a quick switch of tractors and the use of two trailers, and despite an early lunch break necessitated by the heat and humidity, a satisfactory 645 bales were stored in the loft by 4:00 pm. We now have a total of 1,014 bales, with more to cut in the bottom fields, to meet our goal of 2,000 bales.

Without the 2955 tractor it was tricky for Farmer Jeff to use the rotary hoe and then the Lilliston cultivator to get ahead of the weeds between the rows of corn in fields 5 & 6. It is easier to position its wider wheels and avoid wiping out a row of corn. The small acreage of spelt in field 3 will be allowed to mature further before baling, and the bales used in our feed mix for the hogs and chickens.

In mid-June one hundred tomato plants were planted and mulched at the half-way point in field 3. As an experiment, to determine which method works the best, approximately a third of the plants were staked, a third caged, and the remainder allowed to grow on top of the ground. It will probably be late August before we can begin picking to assess the results.

The Alpha Group of Delaware recently brought as many as 12 people to spend every morning for three weeks working at Stratford. They were guided by our agriculture interns Alexis and Katelyn. The group worked on a number of projects. It was noticeable how tidy and well-swept the aisles of the barn looked after their efforts. They also carried out the feeding chores for a week when there were no farm campers, they weeded and mulched the blackberries, spent many hours clearing invasives, and helped the bee team by labeling and capping the jars filled with this year's honey. We were glad to have them and appreciated their efforts.

The three weeks of 9-12 years old campers is over. One of their activities was building and lighting a campfire. Many of them have never done it before. This year they were split into eleven groups of four with three matches per group, and the goal was to keep a fire going for five minutes. The groups are so eager to light their fires they do not take the time to collect enough tinder and small sticks to ignite the larger sticks they collect in abundance. Of the eleven groups only two succeeded, and there were a number of miffed campers, especially those who held their matches in the air and the wind blew them out. Fortunately, the next activity was a much bigger campfire beside the pond and an opportunity to roast marshmallows, so their downcast faces did not last long.

We continue to offer classes by registration, and full details of our 3rd Saturday of the month Meet the Pollinators and Regenerative Agriculture can be found on our web site. Our 10th annual Enchanted Evening dinner/gala fundraiser is scheduled later this year on Thursday, September 9, once again at the Columbus Zoo Africa Event Center. This year's theme is Celebrating the Treasures of Stratford. You can be a table or community sponsor, donate an auction item, or purchase tickets by going on-line. We are very much looking forward to this opportunity to spend a fun and relaxing evening together.

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