

Roberts' Farm Talk

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2007

Dear Family and Friends,

What a year our family has had! It seems as though we just finished sending out our last newsletter, and that was a year ago. Our year started off with finishing the milkhouse and dairy barn in early January. Our milk cows arrived on January 23rd and they have kept us busy ever since. In early January, the transmission in our van died and we decided not to fix it. The cost to fix it was more than the van was worth. Thanks to our friends at Wendell Ford Sales, we were able to "store" it at their dealership until we made a decision as to what to do. We are so thankful to live in such a caring, small community! We did finally decide to donate the van to the United Society. They will fix the transmission and either sell it and use the proceeds for charity or give it to someone in need of a vehicle. Now our "Farmily" truck is our sole transportation. It is very cozy when we all travel together. We haven't decided what to do about another vehicle...we are praying to be shown the right path.

For Easter, we had our church's sunrise service back on the farm. It was cold and the snow was flying for the service, but it was nice. We really enjoy beginning Easter morning this way on our farm!

The Boys have been very busy this year with baseball, helping around the farm, and school. Michael and Paul both played baseball this year. Unfortunately, they were on separate teams which meant we had baseball 4 times a week at minimum. This presented some challenges since milking interfered with baseball. With the help of family and friends, it all worked out fine. The Boys bought two Nigerian Dwarf goats this spring. Their names are Brooks and Butterscotch. As the Boys get older, they are able to help more with the farm work. This past year they were able to help move the cows from pasture to pasture. They also are helping to collect eggs, prepare the cows for milking, and tend to the baby chicks. We love to have their help. Right now they are eager (well usually) to help, so we take all we can get. We know this may not be the case in a few more years.

Dawn has been working more on the farm. Since we started milking, she has been helping with both milkings. We have the whole process down to about one hour. Dawn also has her hands full taking care of three boys. When she isn't milking or taking care of us she is doing laundry, cleaning the house, washing eggs, keeping track of farm sales, finding/inventing projects for me, and cooking. The Boys are VERY BLESSED to have her in their lives. We could simply not function without her. Dawn drove to Nebraska with my sister Jenny over Thanksgiving weekend to get my parents. My brother Ben had an

accident involving his roof and gravity. My parents went out to help and they needed brought home. Anyway, we three Boys truly realized how much we need Dawn! With all she does on the farm, Dawn decided to not be active in Tupperware anymore.

I have had a long year of trying to keep up with all of the projects on the farm. Some days it seems as though there will never be any headway made; but, fortunately, things do get done. Probably the most important lesson we have all had to learn this year is about flexibility. The work gets done, but maybe not as fast or exactly as you planned! The dry weather this year made it difficult to prepare for winter as I had planned. We ended up having to use all of the hay fields for pasture. This was part of our long term goal, but flexibility is a necessity on our farm...so sometimes long term goals become the way things are done today. This Spring, we installed headlocks in the milking barn to create a safer environment for ourselves & the cows. A HUGE "thank you" to our family members who lent us their "muscle" to install them in just a few hours. There is definitely strength in numbers!

In April, I was invited to speak to a 7th grade science class in Carrollton. I spoke with them about our farm and how we do things. It was fun and the kids seemed to enjoy hearing about our farm and asking questions. In September, Dawn and I had a booth at a field day, sponsored by the USDA, in Augusta. We were in the Small Farms tent. We talked to many people about our farm. It was very cold that day, but it was fun talking with all of the visitors. Then, in October we hosted a farm tour here. This particular tour was sponsored by OEFFA, OSU, and SARE. OEFFA is our organic certifying agency and SARE is the organization I received my biodiesel grant through. We had about 70 people in attendance. We showed them our milking facilities, cows, poultry, pastures, and our biodiesel system. It was another year of bountiful blessings from our gardens. Dawn & my mom canned & froze a lot of produce from Spring to Fall. We also had some friends out to help us plant & harvest our potatoes. That was so appreciated, since a 50# bag of potato pieces yielded over 500#'s of nice sized potatoes!

All in all, we have had a great year on the farm! We are so excited for what the future holds for us. We are witnessing every day how God showers his people with blessings. All you have to do is ask, listen, and have faith! We are so thankful for each and every one of you! Thank you for your prayers, your friendship, your love, and your patronage.

Pasture Raised Beef

This year has been drastically different from last year; but, that's farming. The beef cattle we are raising this year have been with us since September 2006. I mentioned earlier that the dry spring and summer presented some "opportunities" for us. Our greatest one presented itself in the form of too little pasture. I had figured out all of our pasture schemes late last year and concluded that I had enough pasture for all of the beef and dairy cows, plus enough fields left for hay. Wrong. We ended up using all of the hay fields for pasture, plus some areas we haven't cleared yet. The beef cows in particular, were forced to use areas I had not intended to use yet. This turned out to be a blessing, in that I was able to see how I might be able to use the land we have more efficiently. I learned that cows can find lots to eat in an overgrown, weed infested field. It brings to mind a thought about our whole farming endeavor: when we do things with prayerful consideration, we succeed. Sometimes the success seems to be a failure in our eyes, but looking back, we see the lesson we have learned from it.

This year we are raising 8 beef for slaughter. I started with 10, but decided to sell 2 earlier in the year. (THANK YOU to Jim & Nicki Coy for allowing us to borrow their stock trailer to move our animals & transport hay!) So far 6 of the 8 beef are spoken for, so if you are still interested in having some healthy Roberts' Farm grass-fed beef in your freezer, let us know ASAP. They will be slaughtered this month (January '08). We also offer cuts of beef (year-round) if you are interested in a smaller amount. Prices and availability are outlined in the attached flyer.

Pastured Lamb

We are excited to offer our customers the opportunity to purchase lamb from our good friends, Monty & Lynn Morrison (Bellbridge Farm). We share the same views on the benefits of pasturing animals. Monte has given us a lot of advice on MiG (Managed Intensive Grazing). Their farm is in southern Carroll County, and they can be reached at 740-945-0168, or feel free to call us & we'll be happy to coordinate the transaction for you. Their prices are as follows:

Rack of Lamb	\$13/lb.	Ground Lamb	\$6/lb.
Lamb Chop	\$13/lb.	Lamb Sausage	\$8/lb.
Leg of Lamb	\$6/lb.	(hot or mild)	
Lamb Leg Steak	\$6/lb.	Lamb Ribs	\$3/lb.
Lamb Shank	\$6/lb.	Organ Meat	\$3/lb.

Free-Range Eggs

Last year I said 100 chickens was too much for us. Right now, I wish I had 100 egg layers! Starting this year, we will be buying a new batch of egg layers every year. We see this as the only way to ensure we have enough eggs to meet the demand. Our plan is to make a movable egg layer shelter we can put in the pasture field with the dairy cows. The chickens will be 3 to 4 days behind the dairy cows in their pasture rotation. The chickens will help distribute the cow manure, because they will scratch apart the manure piles. They will also eat the fly larvae that are in the manure piles thus helping control the fly problem. (Isn't it cool how God's creation works perfectly, if you let it!) We will get our new flock of 100 birds in April sometime and put them in the movable house. We will keep the current birds in the barn until the new batch starts laying. Then we will fill soup chicken orders with the current batch. We have about 80 birds, so if you want soup chickens for next year, let us know. Whatever we don't have soup chicken orders for, we will probably take to the auction. The new batch will stay in the movable house until October, then they will move into the barn. Predators have been a problem for us this year. We have lost close to a dozen birds to hawks and owls. The owl problem is easy for me to fix. I just have to make sure all of the chickens are in when I shut the doors at night! The hawks are a different story. We have read some articles that talk about hanging streamers on poles around the chickens' area. The streamers make the hawks think they do not have a clear path to dive bomb the chickens and they go away. We may try this in 2008. One point I must address as we head into the new year is our egg price. As we continue to work hard and provide you with quality products, we occasionally need to adjust our prices. After January 1, our price per dozen will increase from \$1.75 to \$2.00.

****We need another refrigerator for the farm. If you have a gently used one you'd like to sell, please let us know.****

Range-Fed Meat Chickens

This year we raised two batches of meat chickens. Our first batch started with 75 Buckeye Chickens. These are a "dual purpose" breed - good for both meat and egg laying. They are also a non-hybrid chicken. We wanted to try a more natural type of bird. The Buckeyes grew very slowly and were not very big...1-2 lbs. The second batch we raised were the white, Cornish-cross chickens. They are bred for meat. They grew faster and had more meat on them (3-5 lbs.) than the Buckeyes. We will be raising the Cornish-cross chickens for our meat birds from now on.

Predators were also a problem with our meat chickens. We lost between 12-15 birds to raccoons

from our first batch. I had to fix the hoop houses so they were more secure. We are planning to raise more meat chickens this year. The demand for our pastured poultry is increasing and we want to meet the demand. If you are interested, please let us know so we can get you on our list.

Also, we need to find a new chicken processor. B&P Poultry has decided to close its doors. If you know of another (local) processor, please give us a call.

Range-Fed Turkeys

I spoke earlier about trying non-hybrid fowl for our meat chickens this past year. We did the same experiment with our turkeys this year. We raised Red Bourbon and Blue Slate turkeys. These types of turkeys are called "heritage" breeds. They are non-hybrid turkeys. They grow slow and do not get very large. Our largest bird this year weighed 12 pounds. They tasted great, and we had no complaints; but, we were not satisfied with their size. Next year, we plan to go back to the turkeys we used the first year, the Bronze Breasted variety. If you are interested in a fresh turkey for your 2008 Thanksgiving, please let us know.

****We think it's important to mention that in order for our pastured poultry to contribute towards the sustainability of our farm, the amount of time/labor involved in "growing" the birds must produce 3-5 lb. broilers in 6 weeks and an average of 15 lb. turkeys in 20 weeks. We've learned that the non-hybrid types just won't cut it.****

Dairy Cows

We started milking cows on January 23 this year. Our milk is certified organic and goes all the way to New York State to HP Hood Dairy. It is sold under the name Stoneyfield Farms Organic Milk. Since January 23rd we have been swamped with work. This is part of the reason that this is our first and only newsletter for this year. It took us several months to get into a routine with milking. Dawn likened it to having your first child, you just have to get a routine established.

We faced many hurdles with the herd we bought/rescued. They had been neglected, and we have been working at bringing them back to good health. We have been weeding out the weak/older ones in order to develop a strong, vibrant, pastured herd that will breed more of the same. The whole process has been another learning experience for us. Through all of this, God has been with us. We were blessed with 13 healthy calves - 6 bulls and 7 heifers.

The heifers are doing well and will enter the milking herd next Spring, 2009. 2 of the boys we sold as "bulls", one we kept for ourselves to use as a future "bull", sold one as a "steer", and kept two as "steers" for ourselves to go into our 2009 grass-fed beef herd.

Because of our lack of pasture situation, we have contracted with my cousin, Ernie Ross, to raise our heifers. Ernie lives in Louisville, OH, about 30 minutes from us. Our girls will be at Ernie's until this Spring. We are also buying our hay from Ernie this year. Another friend of ours, Bill Findley, has our 2 steers on his farm until we're ready for them here. How blessed we are to have all their help!

We have 6 cows confirmed pregnant and due this spring. The rest of the herd will be with the bulls in June. This should allow us to be totally "seasonal" by next Spring, 2009. (Be sure to ask The Boys about our seasonal celebration vacation being planned for February 2009!) Being a "seasonal" dairy means that all of our cows will be having their calves around the same time each year, within 6 weeks of each other. This will be late March into April every year. A cow is "dry" about 60 to 90 days before she gives birth, meaning she makes no milk. Therefore, we will not be milking any cows from January to mid-March. This will give our family and our cows a much needed rest each year. Another nice "break" for us was going to once-a-day milking (AM) at the end of November. (We have caught up on more office work in the last 4 weeks than in the previous 11 months!) We will resume twice-a-day milkings mid-March.

DAIRY HERD SHARE AGREEMENTS

For 2008, we are developing a Herd Share Program. This will allow people to buy a share of our milking herd. Many people are interested in receiving the health benefits from consuming raw, unpasteurized milk and other dairy products. We encourage everyone to investigate these benefits of drinking "real milk". Research has shown that raw milk has helped to alleviate the symptoms of autism, asthma, allergies, and can be tolerated by people who are labeled as "lactose intolerant" from pasteurized & homogenized milk. We have many articles & literature about "real milk" & welcome the opportunity to answer your questions & pass on what we've learned. We are members of the Weston A. Price Foundation & their website is another good source for researching benefits of "raw" foods. (www.westonaprice.org & www.realmilk.com) We have been drinking our whole milk (...we drink whole milk because all the benefits from unpasteurized milk are in the fat = cream...) for months now and we love it...not only is the taste is amazing, but we have noticed a much healthier year for us, too. Dawn has not had any lactose problems drinking

the "real milk" like she does when drinking pasteurized milk. We have also noticed a difference in our energy level when we drink it in the morning - the days we are too busy & don't drink it, our energy level is down. Dawn has been making yogurt and butter, too. We are in the process of looking for an electric cream separator, so we can make larger batches of butter! In Ohio, it is illegal to sell raw milk. However, if you own the animal, you can consume the raw milk from that animal. A Herd Share Agreement will allow those who are interested to own a share of our herd and therefore be entitled to a share of the milk. If you are interested in learning more about our Herd Share Program, please let us know.

Another organization we have joined is the Farmer-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund (FTCLDF). This group is comprised of fellow farmers & consumers who too believe in the importance of having access to healthier foods. Their goal is to eliminate unnecessary legal barriers to thriving farm commerce and expand availability of fresh farm foods. We encourage you to join also. Membership costs are \$50/year for consumers or \$125/year for farmers, and their website is: www.farmtoconsumer.org

Grants

In the last newsletter, I talked about the grant I received for making biodiesel from waste cooking oil. In August, I started making biodiesel and using it in my tractor. I haven't run 100% biodiesel in the tractor yet, but I plan to this summer. I have been mixing the biodiesel with regular petroleum diesel. I have been using about 20% biodiesel. Biodiesel is not good to use in cold weather. It will start to gel up at about 40°F. Mixing it with regular diesel fuel will negate this problem.

We also received another EQIP grant from the USDA this spring. We will use the money to help fund building more fence, creating a milkhouse waste system, running more water to our pastures, building some roadways for the cows to walk on, and making a concrete pad behind the barn to cut down on the mud. Our grant was the largest in Carroll County and the term of the grant is for 10 years.

AVAILABLE IN '08 *CALL US TO RESERVE YOURS* 330-866-2132

Soup Chickens, Meat Chickens, Eggs, Turkeys
Grass-Fed Beef, Dairy Herd Share Agreements
Garden Produce

"The Final Word"

I'd like to take this opportunity (Dawn) to apologize to our customers about our farm's website. I have not had the time to keep it updated with current info & pictures. Hopefully 2008 will be a more efficient year for us. We've heard rumors of a faster online option for rural Carroll County, and are praying that it becomes available to us SOON. Until then, a phone call to us is the best way to communicate. Of course, a personal visit is always great, too!

In conclusion, for the true FINAL WORD, we'll leave you with a quote from Isaiah 55:10-11. "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

