

# Northern Path Family Farm

Spring Newsletter - 2016



According to the Farmer's Almanac the average *last frost* date for Gregory Michigan is listed as May 9<sup>th</sup>. 2016 marks our third welcoming of spring since moving to the farm, and we've taken record of the actual dates for 2014, 2015 and 2016 of when we experienced the last frost occurrence each spring here on the farm. 2014 had us at May 12<sup>th</sup>, and the following year 2015 we were pushed out two more days to the 14<sup>th</sup> of May. So here we are in 2016 and just yesterday folks, May the 19<sup>th</sup>!!!, we walked out to tackle the morning chores and heard the crunch of our boot steps as we walked over frosted clover and orchard grass. It is true that when you live a life that is guided by the growing season, as anyone with a passion for horticultural pursuits will attest, you begin to really tune in to these little details that can have a direct impact on your chances for success in a given year.



This late frost, although a beautiful to look at, does not bode well for the still-tender grafted apple and pear trees that we've already planted out in the orchard. Our big endeavor during this spring 2016 has been focused on trees...many, many trees. Folks we've been working hard to get as many trees in the ground in an effort to complete the establishment of our fruit orchard. I can say that we are almost there! Take a look at page 2 to see the results of our tree planting efforts thus far for 2016 to get an idea of what's occupied most of our time these past few weeks.

As of today, May 20<sup>th</sup>, the farm operations are up and running with layer hens producing over a dozen eggs a day and still increasing their daily yield in response to the increased daylight hours as we head towards the summer solstice. The longer the days, the more eggs we seem to get. Our pastured broilers are outside and being rotated daily over a salad bar of clover, dandelion, plantain, and other succulent forbs. Folks this is the best tasting chicken under the sun. We are running two batches of broilers this year with two on-farm pick up dates. Refer to the pages ahead for information on how to order yours.

We've got a whole host of other new infrastructure and regular maintenance projects that will occupy our time for the remainder of the season. Thank you for your continued support and encouragement as we continue to produce clean, nutrient-dense, animal-welfare conscious food for our family and yours. We look forward to seeing all of you on the farm soon!

# Nuts About Trees

## Our 2016 Planting Record (so far!)

**T**rees of all kinds have dominated most of our early farm activities during these past couple of months. As members of the Michigan Nut Growers Association we took advantage of an opportunity to learn a variety of different grafting methods through workshops held during the off-season winter months. Using these new skills we were able to successfully clone a few desired varieties of both apple and pears that we have since planted out in our developing orchard. We also put a lot of effort into propagating trees from seed which began by planting out seeds in home-made cardboard tree tubes and placing these under heated grow lights in our basement. We had much better luck with this method than we seemed to have had last year; we had very high germination success after learning the different methods of cold-stratifying and scarifying seeds for particular varieties which helped to facilitate successful germination. Of course we also took advantage of both the Ingham and Livingston County Conservation District's annual tree sale which occurs typically in late March/early April. You would be surprised at the variety of trees made available at these perennial sales and the prices cannot be beat at any commercial nursery or big box store. I highly recommend checking out these sources if you plan on purchasing any trees.

- 101 Chinese Chestnut (*Castanea mollissima*)
- 5 American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*)
- 1 Fig (*Ficus carica*)
- 11 Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)
- 10 Hazelnut (*Corylus Americana*)
- 3 Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*)
- 10 Pear (grafted Moonglow & Robgre)
- 10 Apple (grafted Bilbrecht & Fuji)
- 3 Hardy Kiwi (*Actinidia argute*)
- 10 Blueberry (*Vaccinium cyanococcus*)
- 10 Red mulberry (*Morus rubra*)
- 15 Nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*)
- 5 Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*)
- 52 Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)

246 Grand Total

Planting out so many trees has really changed the way things look around the farm. Let us show you some of the interesting varieties the next time you come out to visit us!



*View of 100+ chestnut planted in the back 5 acres.*

## News On The Farm

**S**print is off to a great start here on the farm, despite the slow transition to warmer weather. We began tapping our maple trees for sap in mid-March, and within a few days the sap began to flow. There were a couple of brief warm ups that occurred during those last weeks in March which really kick started the sap flow. In the end we were able to boil down about 1 gallon of sap into delicious maple syrup. This was slightly more than what we did last year, but I contribute that to an early start to tapping this year. We invested in some 'professional' equipment including steel spiles and flip-lid style containers which made the work of collecting sap that much easier.



We received our first batch of chicks through the mail on March 30<sup>th</sup>. We order our chicks from Meyer Hatchery located in Polk Ohio and they have been very reliable and a pleasure to work with these last few years. They are one of the few hatcheries in the nation that offer the Rainbow Ranger variety of meat bird, which we prefer over the industry-standard Cornish cross. The Rainbow Ranger are much more adept at foraging as compared to the Cornish birds, which means they can obtain a higher ratio of their daily intake from the variety of grasses, forbs, and insects on pasture. The Rangers are also a slower growing bird generally taking 10 weeks from hatching to reach maturity for harvest. The Cornish birds can reach maturity

as early as 7 weeks, but this unnatural fast rate of growth is what contributes to so many of health issues associated with the Cornish breed. The Rainbow Rangers have done well here on our farm and so we will continue to raise this breed for successive runs.



The next time you come out to visit us be sure to check out our new tractor! We welcomed here on the farm a 1948 Farmall Cub that we purchased from a retired farmer in the Jackson area. This tractor is a vintage workhorse that was built specifically for small-scale, family farm size tasks. She's in great shape and looks a bit nostalgic some might say with her Farmall red frame and vertical stack muffler. The tractor will serve the purpose of helping us cultivate certain portions of the property to allow us to increase production of some of our annual crops to include pumpkins, squash, corn, etc..





# Aidan's Corner

Hello friends! It's Aidan here back for another interesting story of things here on the farm. So this spring we have been doing a lot of grafting for the first time. Let me explain what grafting means. If you want to copy, or basically clone a tree that you like (it means the fruit that you like), you can clone the tree by grafting.

When the trees are dormant in the winter time, we go and take cuttings from the trees that we want to clone. For example, we really like the Fuji apples so we took cuttings from the Fuji apple tree. These cuttings are called scions and are the new growth from the previous season. You can collect as many scion cuttings as you want but you have to keep them in the refrigerator so they stay in a dormant state until you are ready to graft. Then, later in spring you have to obtain your rootstock. The rootstock is the other half of the graft. You will graft the scion wood on top of the rootstock. The rootstock is like the foundation of the tree and will have the roots and give the tree energy. The scion would on the other hand will have the genes of the apple that you want, in this case the Fuji apple.

In the spring, you make a cut diagonally on the scion wood and the rootstock and then attach them together with tape. Later you will plant these out in the orchard and hope that they take. So far we have done many grafted apples and pears and they are doing well.

There is another kind of grafting we did called a 'bark' graft. In this case we take a scion wood and graft onto an older tree. We have one tree where we have grafted more than one variety and we call it a multi-graft tree. It will give us a bunch of different apples in the future!



*Performing 'bench' grafting with apple scions and rootstock.*



*Aidan showing his completed bark graft of a Fuji scion on a wild apple.*

## *Pastured Chicken*

For 2016 our pastured chicken pricing is **\$4.50/lb**, which remains the same as last season. To remind our customers, we use only certified organic grains as a complement to the natural pasture our birds obtain for their diet. Dressed birds generally weigh on average between 3.5-5 lbs. Please follow the below instructions on how to order:

1). **Email us at:**

[northernpathfamilyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:northernpathfamilyfarm@gmail.com)

and let us know how many birds you will commit to purchase.

2). **Come out to the farm on the announced on-farm pick-up date to pay for and take home your fully-dressed birds.**

### Fall Turkeys

For 2016 our pastured turkey pricing is **\$4.75/lb**. Our fully-dressed turkeys can weigh anywhere from 14lbs (hens) up to 25lbs (toms). Ordering instructions are the same as above, simply send us an email to confirm your commitment to purchase and what quantity. We encourage you to place your order early as the number of birds is limited.



This season we are running (2) separate batches of broiler chickens so we are pleased to announce two separate customer pick-up dates. Please follow the ordering instructions on the left of this page and indicate on which of the following two dates you will come to pick up your order:

*1<sup>st</sup> On-Farm Pick Up - Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>*

*2<sup>nd</sup> On-Farm Pick Up - Sunday Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>*

We receive our birds as one-day old chicks which we raise in a protected and heated brooder for 3 weeks. They are then transferred out on pasture for the next 7 weeks. There they will enjoy a daily diet of fresh greens mixed in with a little protein from the variety of insects made available to them in a pasture that's completely free of insecticides, herbicides, and pesticides which makes for some of the healthiest, cleanest, nutrient-dense chicken you can find!

Be Sure To Visit Us At:  
[www.northernpathfamilyfarm.com](http://www.northernpathfamilyfarm.com)

8775 Roberts Road  
Gregory, MI 48137

*Thank you for supporting  
your local farm!*

