

Northern Path Family Farm

Fall/Winter Newsletter - 2015



Hello friends! The calendar reads November 27th and most of our major farm activities have come to an end for the season. Last weekend we received over 16" of snow accumulation that really put a halt to most of what we were able to accomplish outdoors. Fortunately we were able to process all of our Thanksgiving turkeys just hours before the big snowfall hit. We ended up with only 7 turkeys to process this year for customers, having started with a total of 15 chicks that we received in August. There's always the 1 or 2 that we lose within the first three days of arrival, which can be attributed to bad genetics or poor overall disposition. However the majority of our losses this year occurred due to predation, which for us in 2015 proved to be the bane of trying to keep our livestock *alive!* Our poultry were assailed from both the ground and air, and surprise attacks came during the day and at night. On one particular August night under the cover of darkness the brash raccoon found his way through the electric fence and dug his way underneath the turkey pen to get inside and have his way with 4 young poults. Needless to say it was not a pleasant sight the next morning. It was only after closer inspection that I came to realize that we had failed to turn the electric fence back on after feeding the turkeys the previous day, which was a hard pill to swallow knowing that the incident could have been prevented altogether.

The attacks from hungry predators were not limited to just the turkeys; similar hardships occurred with our layer flock of chickens that unpredictably tested our resolve. A 3,000 volt electric fence is useless against the aerial attacks from the red-tail hawk or the great horned owl. It was a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon when I witnessed what I at first thought was a young fawn deer standing near the electric fence that contained our flock of hens. At 200 yards away I had to squint my eyes in an effort to bring more clarity for positive identification. I then realized that this was not a deer, but in fact a very large red fox! I quickly grabbed my .22 caliber rifle and took off in an all out sprint towards the assailant. Arriving and out of breath, I could only watch the back end of the fox bounding off through the tall orchard grass with no chance for a redemption shot. The damage was done...3 hens this time. And there was the problem, a previously undetected hole in the electric fence that the sly fox had discovered and capitalized on. Another hard lesson learned.

This and similar surprise incidents took a major toll on both our turkeys and layer flock this year. Of course, we use the lessons learned from each of these experiences to put in place the necessary countermeasures to do as much as possible to thwart future predation problems. For example, we now have a documented schedule in place for periodic fence inspection and maintenance. We also now have 3 batteries for the fence charger instead of just 1, which we alternate on a regular schedule for charging so we always have a charged battery at the ready. Our portable pens and similar structures are also duly inspected on a weekly basis to check for the slightest opening through which a predator might enter. Our livestock are in essence our *living stock*, and as such like any asset we simply cannot allow unnecessary losses to occur when the solutions for prevention are relatively simple.



Sunrise over a frosted pasture – Nov. 12

For all the hardships experienced this year, we no doubt had many more successes to be thankful for in 2015. We managed to get hundreds of trees in the ground to establish our orchard. We will continue this effort in early spring 2016 with hundreds more to plant. We built a new tool shed which we originally did not expect to finish this year. We also experienced great success with our annual vegetable garden along with our corn and grain crops. We hope to see an even greater yield and more diversity in plantings in 2016. With the colder weather setting in, now is the season to begin setting our goals and developing the plans to achieve those goals for 2016. We have an ambitious goal of tackling a greenhouse for next year, which will help us get an even earlier start with our plantings in the seasons to come. More details on that activity in future updates. Thanks for reading!

For The Love of Old Tools

For anyone who has had the opportunity to visit us on the farm, they've surely taken notice that a large share of the tasks that we perform we do using traditional hand tools. Whether it's cutting hay with a scythe, splitting wood with an axe, removing the bark from a locust log with a drawknife, or jointing a board with a No. 6 Bailey foreplane, nothing compares to traditional hand tools for simplicity and performance. Yes, I suppose I could gas up the weed trimmer and don on a set of goofy earmuffs to drown out the deafening drone while I trim back the weeds in the orchard, all while trying to avoid inhaling the fumes from the 2-stroke exhaust. But I would much rather prefer to shoulder a stone-sharpened European scythe and instead don a wide-brimmed straw hat to shield against the June sun and stroll casually through the orchard to perform the same task. This way, I can indulge in the meditative and rhythmic sound of the scythe blade cutting through dew-soaked grass with each swing of the custom-fit snath. And with unimpeded hearing, while scything I can simultaneously take note of the varied birdsong around me, and survey which new species have arrived overnight, and which ones have remained from the day before. These slight but significant observations can nary be had whilst encumbered

with a gas powered weed eater. To some I know, this sounds a bit overly 'purist', but the advantages of no electricity or gas required, simple construction, simple maintenance, quiet, gracefully effective, and provides health benefits are some of the reasons why I believe hand tools are the bomb!

I'm pleased to introduce our most recent addition to our collection of simple but effective tools we use here on the homestead. Below is a picture of a late 19th century *corn sheller*. This simple machine makes quick efficient work of shelling the corn kernels off of your dried corn. This model was manufactured by the Tiffin Agricultural Works company in the late 1800's, and at over 100 years old, she still works as good as the day she was manufactured. Go to our website and click on the video link to see a new YouTube video where Aidan demonstrates its operation and effectiveness.

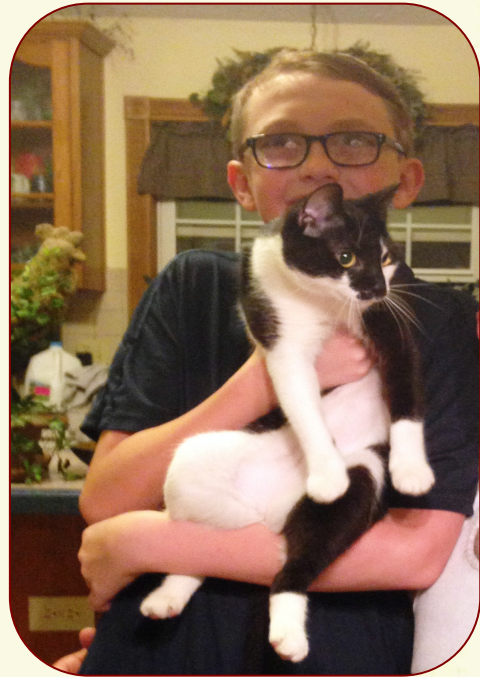
1880's Corn Sheller -Long Live Old Tools!





Aidan's Corner

Hi everyone! It's Aidan and in this issue of our newsletter I am talking about my new cat Dakota. First, we got her in the summer at the adoption center. We were talking about getting a cat all July and we finally got her at the end of July. She loves to play fetch with her mouse but she never brings it back. She surprisingly likes water. She sometimes jumps in the shower while the water is running. She is a unique cat. She sleeps on her back and stretches on her back. She is black and white. We wanted to get a cat because we wanted some company around the house. She likes to take catnaps and play. When we got her we opened the cage at the adoption center and she put her paws on my chest and licked me on the face. After that, we knew that she was our cat and we got her. Dakota is a licker she licks us and gives us kisses a lot. In conclusion, that is my cat Dakota. I hope you some day meet her and thanks for reading Aidan's Corner. See you all next time on the farm.



Meet our new cat...Dakota!



Sound asleep!

Looking Ahead to 2016...

This venture of ours into regenerative/restorative farming has really just begun, and we are still very much in what we call the establishment phase of our farm. In these first 5 years our focus is to design, develop, and establish the systems that will serve to yield long-term perennial abundance for our family and our local customers. Below are a couple of highlights for what we have in store for 2016.

Orchard and Silvopasture Development

Part of our initial development includes the establishment of our fruit and nut orchard which, as the system matures, will provide a food source for us and our livestock as well as a resource for future plant propagation for our fledgling nursery. We are also developing the layout for our *silvopasture* model which will be located on southernmost 5 acres of our property. Here we will plant hundreds of trees all on contour, including primarily mast yielding trees such as chestnut, oak, pecan, and black locust. Between each contour-based row of trees will be a 20-30 foot wide lane where we will plant various pasture forages, within which we will graze our future sheep, pork, and cows, followed in succession by paddock-shifted chickens and turkeys. This system, once established, will provide abundant seasonal mast yields which will serve to supplement our grazing animals and continue to improve soil health and ecosystem diversity for many decades into the future. We will begin this initial phase establishment of the silvopasture in 2016.

Chickens

For 2016 we will continue our ever-successful pastured poultry model with (2) runs of rainbow ranger broiler birds. These birds, unlike the industrialized Cornish cross breed, are significantly more adept at foraging, which complements our pasture based model as the rainbow rangers can obtain up to 30% of their daily diet from the variety of grasses, forbs, and insects that they find on the ground. We will have two on-farm pick-up dates; one will occur in early June and one will follow in mid August. We will publish confirmed dates for pick up in subsequent newsletters.

Turkeys

We did not anticipate the huge demand for our turkeys that we experienced in 2015 (thanks in part to our new listing on LocalHarvest.org), so hence we are planning to significantly scale-up our turkey production for 2016. We've had great success with the broad-breasted white breed, with a noticeably higher feed to weight conversion ratio compared to the broad-breasted bronze variety that we ran in 2014. We will announce further details on ordering instructions and pick-up dates for next year in a future newsletter.

Be Sure To Visit Us At:
www.northernpathfamilyfarm.com

8775 Roberts Road
Gregory, MI 48137

See you all in 2016!

Jason, Patty, & Aidan Brake

