


Northern Path Family Farm

Spring Newsletter - 2017



Like many homesteaders, we gauge the severity of our winters according to the size of the stack of firewood that still remains in the woodyard come the end of February. Judging by what we have left, certainly this has been a mild one compared to some of those we've experienced in recent years. When you rely on wood as a fuel source to heat your home, it is a great feeling to look outside and still see a few cords of wood left sitting in the 'savings account', which will only



continue to gain 'interest' by benefiting from additional seasoning in time for next year's heating season. That doesn't mean that we'll work any less this spring when we take to the woods to cut new wood to add to the pile. Having experienced what it's like to *run out* of wood at just the wrong time, we know better to put the hard work in during the early part of spring to cut, buck, split, and stack enough wood to carry us through what we assume will be the worst winter on record to come. That way, what we don't end up using is just insurance for next season! 

In a few short weeks we'll once again be greeted by the evening song of the spring peepers as they uncover themselves from their winter burrows, one of the indicators that true spring is really upon us. Soon after we'll take notice of the early blooming forbs and flowers in the pasture like yellow-rocket and crocus, as well as the gorgeous pink-hued apricot blossoms. We're always in awe at the splendor of spring to see everything resurrect itself from the dead of winter and come alive again with renewed vigor. As we begin to come out of hibernation ourselves, we'll begin to get back outside to get things in order in preparation for an exciting 2017 growing season here on the farm. In the pages to follow we'll give you an idea of what's in the works for this year and what our long term goals are for the farm. Also please take note that we have established our customer on-farm pick-up dates for 2017. You'll find the details on page 7.

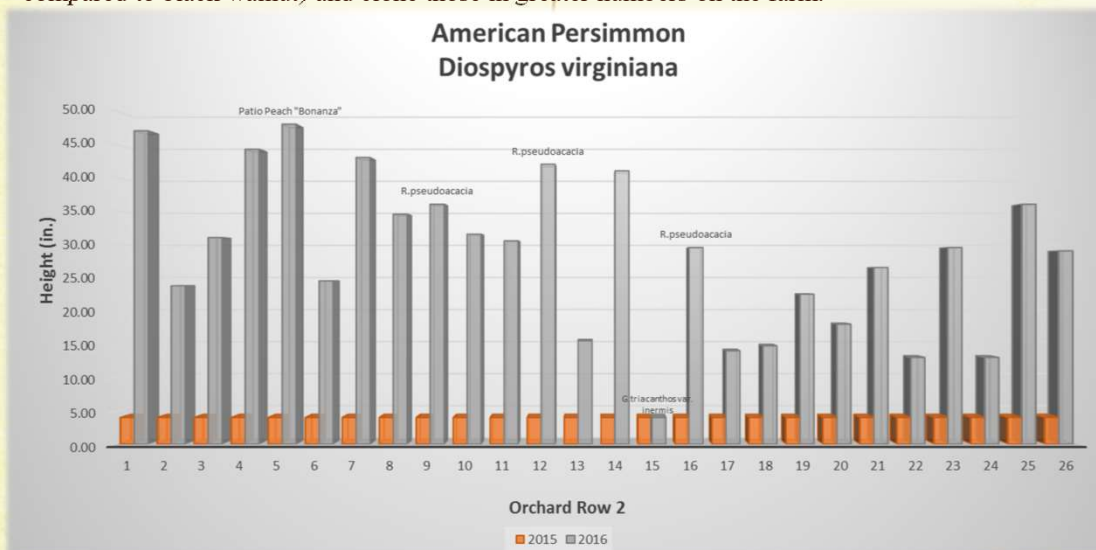
Happy Spring to you and yours!!

Harvests Ahead

What's in store in 2017 and beyond!

This season will mark the start of our 4th year of production here on the farm. We are very much still in the establishment phase, with much of our expended efforts focused on building the necessary infrastructure and systems that will, once in place, provide for years of abundant yields that will serve our family as well as our customers. Below is a glimpse of some of the notable activities and projects that we will focus on through the 2017 season that will help steer us to that goal.

- Fruit & Nut Tree Planting** – Again, as we've done the last two seasons, we will undertake a mass planting of bare-root stock trees in early spring which will add to the already hundreds of trees that we've established as part of our orchard & silvopasture design. The first task at hand will be to dig out from our tree nursery the 1-year old saplings that we grew from seed last year and transplant these to their final specified location on the farm. These include 25 honey locust, 40 wild pear, and 18 black walnut, which we hope will have made it through the winter. In addition, we've ordered another 25 persimmon and 25 hazelnut from the local conservation district that we will plant out in late April which will complement the large planting of the same species we planted out two years ago that are absolutely thriving. With each new cycle of the seasons it becomes evident, after planting hundreds of trees, which trees are suited to do well in our soils and which trees show only marginal performance. Trees that show excellent vigor thus far include black & honey locust, persimmon (ref. growth chart below), hazelnut, chestnut (*C. mollissima*), and northern pecan. Pawpaw and nannyberry (*V. lentago*) on the other hand are showing less promise than originally hoped. Lastly, as an experiment we will attempt to graft Carpathian walnut scions onto black walnut rootstock. The goal here is to propagate from the two existing Carpathian trees on the farm (which we estimate to be between 50-70 years old) selecting for those characteristics of the nuts from those trees (thin-shelled, large nut, easy to crack compared to black walnut) and clone those in greater numbers on the farm.



Persimmon - from 6" sapling in 2015 to over 3' height in one year!

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- **Sheep Rearing** – We had great success in 2016 with raising our first pair of pigs. Every step of the way, from training them to electric fence as weaned piglets, to managing for their feed and water needs up through maturity, to the final butchering process, all went according to plan. This season, we're opting to bring on 4 Katahdin sheep to rotationally graze throughout our orchard. Function stacking is the name of the game on our farm, which simply means that before we decide to introduce a new element into the system, we evaluate the functions of that element and make a judgement as to the value of that element compared to the opportunity to bring in something else. The end goal should always be that all elements on the farm should serve more than one function, and all functions on the farm should *ideally* be served by more than one element. Specifically, with sheep as an introduced element they will serve the function of grazing (and thereby maintaining) the grass & weed height in our orchard, they will fertilize our young orchard with their nitrogen-rich manure, and in the end they will provide a meat yield for our family. Conversely, sheep *are not the only* elements serving those same functions. Vegetation control is also maintained by our goats and poultry (to a lesser degree); our orchard is also fertilized by daily movements of the chicken tractor, and our poultry and pigs also provide us with a meat yield. In addition, sheep are true grazers, like bovine, and should do exceptionally well to convert our lush pastures, comprised of a variety of leguminous forbs and grasses, into delectable meat. A farm can be thought of as a system of energy conversions, where in this case, we'll see solar energy converted to grass, which is then converted to meat, which in the end will yield a lovely rare rack of lamb on the dinner table! This will be a trial run of sorts, the results of which will help us determine if it is something we can expand on and make available for sale to our customers in the future.
- **Shiitake Cultivation** – Every year in late winter we cut 20 new oak billets to add to our shiitake cultivation yard. Each log is drilled with 50 holes, 5/16" dia. by 1" deep, into which we insert a pre-inoculated wooden dowel plug that contains the mycelium of a specific strain of shiitake mushroom that we aim to grow. That's 1,000 holes that are drilled in total, so you can imagine it is a day-long activity! After approximately one year duration of going through what's called a 'spawn run', the logs will begin fruiting delicious shiitake mushrooms! In a few years we will have established enough logs to allow us to begin commercial marketing of our product as well as general sale to local customers.



*Done by
Mary Conner
gardener
St. Paul
Master*

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- **Barn Repairs & Restoration** – With so many other exciting activities to occupy our time during the season, it is very easy to overlook the need to address some of the structural concerns with our older out-buildings that are becoming more obvious with each passing year. We have two fairly large barns on the farm, and they both need significant shoring up, not only with the cosmetic issues but also with the foundation and structural joints. Our long term goal (and hope!) is to keep them both standing, but we have our work cut out for us. The larger barn was built in 1856, and the mortared rock foundation is crumbling apart. If we don't address these areas soon we will surely lose these lovely buildings which we would hate to do. To the extent that we can, we will effort to make them at minimum structurally sound, after which we can then progress with cleaning them up cosmetically and making more use of them as we go. We've committed to devoting time this season to attack the areas of most concern to prevent any further degradation.



Wall beginning to buckle... needs a fixin!

- **Butcher Shop Planning** – Whether we incorporate this idea into our plans to restore the barns, or we build a smaller, separate structure in a different location, eventually we will build a dedicated butcher shop which will serve as our focal point for our livestock butchery, processing and meat curing. Our goal is to build upon our successes with our learned methods of traditional, old world style charcuterie and curing methods by building a dedicated location where we can focus and expand these offerings for eventual sale to our customers. To do it right, we need a specialized location where all the tools and equipment are housed under one roof and thereby provide the efficiencies needed to be successful on a larger scale. We will always remain comparatively small scale, or better said 'small batch', which will allow us to produce unmatched quality products that are rooted in artisanal methods. This is our niche, and we will never compromise or take any short cut along the way to high quality end product. The dedicated butcher shop will give us the facility and tools we need to help us continue down this path. Won't be done this year, but the planning has begun.



Aidan's Corner

Greetings friends! I've got a neat thing I wanted to share with you. We will soon begin raising our own bees on the farm. In fact we will start this year. One of our good friends, John, is teaching us the basics of beekeeping. John has been raising bees for many years and has taught us a lot. The benefits of having bees is that they will help pollinate all of the plants you want to grow. This will be a big help for all of the fruit and nut trees that we are growing. In addition the bees produce honey, which is delicious. We are super excited to raise our own bees this year and hopefully we can enjoy our own honey in the fall from what our bees produce.

John is teaching us how to manage our beehives. There are many things that can harm the bees like mites and pesticides. We want to provide a healthy farm for the bees to enjoy. We need to make sure they remain healthy so we must inspect the hives to check on things. To do so we wear special clothing to protect us in case one of them wants to sting. I will let you know how we do this year!



Protective gear to avoid any stings.



Receiving instruction on how to inspect your hives.

2017 Pastured Poultry

For 2017 our pastured chicken pricing is **\$4.25/lb.** 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

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 2017 our pastured turkey pricing is **\$4.50/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.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

CHICKENS

1st On-Farm Pick Up - Sunday June 11th

2nd On-Farm Pick Up - Sunday Sept. 10th

TURKEYS

On-Farm Pick Up - Sunday Nov. 19th

We receive our birds as one-day old chicks which we initially raise in a protected and heated brooder, after which they are transferred out on pasture. 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

8775 Roberts Road
Gregory, MI 48137

*Thank you for supporting
your local farm!*

