

Mossback Farm News

September 2005

Vol. 3 No.2



Greetings from the farm!

Fall is nearly upon us and gratefully, we are nearing the slower-paced time of year. 2005 brought some changes to our farm and 2006 will bring even more, so we thought we'd fill you in on what we've been up to and what's in the works for next year.



Mossback Farm Update – 2005 Recap

This year we expanded our grazing animal operations with the birth of several lambs and the arrival of 2 steers. In early spring 9 lambs were born to our 5 ewes. Sadly one lamb did not survive (she was the smallest of a set of triplets produced by the ewe we call "Mama",) and another ewe produced a "bummer" lamb -one that wouldn't nurse- that we bottle-fed. For a week, everywhere that Val went on the farm, the lamb was also sure to go. We found a family in Sheridan who wanted a lamb and so "Pumpkin" found a good home. We sold several of the lambs and the folks who paid their lamb deposits will be getting their harvest from the butcher in late October.



Our neighbors the Willsons procured several steers from a local organic dairy this summer and we bought 2 of them. They are Jerseys and are very tame since they were bottle-fed for the first several weeks of life. We'll keep them until next fall. In spring we'll have more information about ordering meat from these steers.

2005 was the first year that we raised pigs. In May we bought 5 "weaner" pigs from a small farm in Hillsboro and managed to hang on to them until the butcher came for them last week. There were several mornings when we woke up to discover that the pigs had decided to take a little unguided tour around the farm, but we always managed to round them up.

Despite the pigs being slightly smaller than we had hoped, we're extremely excited to get the meat back from the butcher around the last week of September.

We ended up with 2 batches of broiler chickens this year rather than 3. Due to feed and transportation costs, we decided to cancel our October chicken batch. While raising our first batch, we discovered that the local raven population found our chickens quite irresistible. We lost over a third of the batch to the ravens. Happily, our June batch had none of the same problems since we kept the chickens more protected from overhead.

Finally, Egg Drop sold out quite early this year, and our egg supply has been dwindling since June. We actually had to stop delivering eggs to one site and to hold eggs back at least a couple of weeks this summer, pushing the end of Summer Egg Drop to the last week of September. Due to the egg shortages and high gasoline and feed costs we are planning to end our egg deliveries for the year in mid October. Egg Drop customers will be notified shortly about refund options.

We also learned the hard way that this was not the best year to sell fruit shares! The blueberry harvest was the only one that has been really successful. Our friends at Cherry Blossom Farms didn't have enough cherries for any fresh cherry sales, and neither did the people at the original organic peach or apple farms. We are in the processing of sourcing organic apples from Hood River since we'll be travelling through there this week. We've learned a lot about the vagaries of farming this year!

Mark your calendars now ...

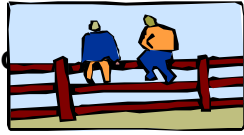
Stewing hens!
Available Oct. 21st for Portland delivery or
Oct. 22nd for on-farm pick-up

**Annual Fall Work party and harvest party on
Saturday October 22nd, 2005**

**Winter tree planting work party
late February 2006**

Farm Musings: Interns and our vision of co

by Val Blaha



Running a farm and carrying out restoration projects on 40 acres is no small task. This year we have greatly benefitted from the assistance of volunteers such as Christian and Hunter, and from our interns Charlie and Norris.

Charlie was with us from May to August, and proved to be a good worker and animal caretaker. Our June chickens thrived under his care. Norris came here in August and will be with us until mid October. He is a tireless worker, as evidenced by the amount of Scotch broom (a noxious weed) that he has hacked back in just 3 short weeks! Our lives have been greatly enriched by both the hard work and great conversations shared with both Charlie and Norris, and we thank them for sharing their time with us.

Both the presence of interns and the impending peak oil crisis have encouraged us to think more about our long term vision for Mossback Farm. We had always envisioned it as a teaching farm, where people could come and learn about animal husbandry, conservation, etc. And we also envisioned a community of friends sharing the land with us. Due to zoning laws, we can't have additional families living here on the land permanently – yet. However we hold to our vision of Mossback Farm as a community of like-minded, earth-oriented folks, and we are looking forward to the day that we can make our vision a reality.



Annual Fall Work Party **Saturday October 22nd** **12pm to 4pm**

Yes, it's that time of year again and Rich is busy planning the work party! This year we'll be working on projects such as covercropping, mulching, willow staking, and continued dam repair.

We'll have more details on our website in October about exactly what we'll be working on and what to bring, but if you've been meaning to get out to visit all year, or just want to help us continue the restoration work we've been doing, mark your calendars now!

The future of Egg Drop



Sadly, after several years of offering our high quality, great tasting eggs to customers from Forest Grove to Portland, we have decided to stop egg production. This was a hard decision, but one we feel good about now that it has been made.

Although we enjoy raising hens and offering eggs for sale to our customers, several factors went into this decision. The biggest one is the cost and time involved in purchasing and transporting chicken feed. The price for organic chicken feed has gone up by 30-40% since we started raising the hens several years ago. And gas prices, well, everyone knows how much gasoline prices have risen, even over the past year. Between those two factors, we have concluded that egg production is just not economically sustainable for our farm at this time.

At least 3 other factors have also gone into this decision. One is the increasing number of egg farmers in the Portland area. When we started raising hens back in 2000, there were only a handful of local egg farmers. Now on any given Saturday at the Portland farmers market, you can expect to find 4 or more farmers with eggs. While we will miss the satisfaction of supplying our customers with eggs, we feel confident that there are some other good farmers out there who would be happy for your support! (Such as our friends Chenin and Sean at Cherry Blossom Farms who raise hens the same way we do, and sell at the Portland Farmers Market.)

Another factor is that we are trying to plan for long-term farm sustainability and we believe that comes from raising products that don't require as many off-farm inputs such as grains. This is one of the reasons why we are starting to concentrate more on the sheep and cattle... they are perfectly suited to our 40 acres of grass and only require minor off farm supplements such as hay and minerals.

A final factor could be called the "chore" factor. Hens are a year-round proposition, and we had to consider the time involved in taking care of the hens (getting feed, etc), weighed against the farmers getting a day off once in a while, in our decision about long-term farm sustainability.

We hope you will understand and support our decision!





Rich's Conservation Corner

News about exciting conservation plans for Mossback Farm!

This year a lot of planning and preparation went into signing up the farm in a couple of conservation programs run by the US Dept. of Agriculture. The first, the Conservation Security Program (CSP), is a result of the 2002 Farm Bill. It pays farmers for doing the right thing for the land, water, and wildlife...rather satisfying, since they are measures we were taking anyway.

The second, bigger program we are in the final throes of signing onto is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). It takes marginal land along waterways out of production to benefit fish and water quality. In addition to a small per-acre payment, the program cost-shares the price of fencing and native trees in the enrolled acreages. All told, we'll be planting something like 4,000 trees in these areas in the next few years. Keep an eye on our website for work party dates (the next couple are Oct 22 and late February)...we'll be needing the help!

Chicken Chat

Laying hens and/or stewing chickens available in October!



Since we are ending our egg production in October, we are looking to find homes for our layers.

We look at this last step of the hens' life cycle as a way to use the resource as wisely as possible. The hens are just turning 2 years old and still have a few years of egg production left. They would be perfect for city chicken keepers who maybe have lost a hen or two to illness or predators. The hens will probably molt (lose their feathers) this winter but will pick up egg production again in early spring. We'll be selling them for \$6 each and you can come out to the farm to pick them up on the work party date, or at another time by the end of October by appointment. If you are interested or want more info, just call us at 503 852 9585 or drop us an email at val@mossbackfarm.com.

For those more interested in meat, we are also selling the hens as "stewing chickens". We last had stewers available in winter of 2004. These are chickens that make wonderful chicken soup, and the meat can be shredded and used for tacos or stews. The best way to cook the

stewers is by putting them in a pot with water, spices, vegetables, wine, and anything else that might be good, and to cook them for several hours. Please see the attached order form for more information on the stewers.

Sheep and Pigs and Cattle - oh yes!

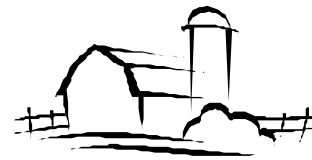


We've been very satisfied with our foray into Katahdin sheep production and plan to offer 8-10 lambs for sale next year. We'll also mostly like be raising pigs again and will have beef from our steers available.

The cost for all of these meats will be approximately \$4.00-6.00/lb. We'll have minimum order requirements - for sheep and pigs it will probably be 1/2 of the animal. If you're interested, we encourage you to start talking with friends or neighbors to see if they might be interested in purchasing the meat with you. Also, if you have been thinking about buying a chest freezer, it would certainly come in handy for storing the meat, as well as fruits and other goodies!

We will have ordering available on our website in spring, and with our spring newsletter-- look for it by next March!

Thanks for your continued support of our farm!



**Val and Rich Blaha
Mossback Farm**

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(we don't receive mail at the farm, so please use the PO Box for all correspondence and payments)

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