

Mossback Farm News

January 2005

Vol. 3 No.1



Greetings from the farm!

The new year has begun, and so us Mossback Farmers are swinging into action. The cold days and long nights provide us with plenty of time to ponder where we've been and what's coming next, and to think good thoughts about all the customers who make it possible to do the work we love.



Mossback Farm Update

Exciting new additions are planned for 2005 at Mossback Farm, so we want to share with you what is afoot for the new year, as well as some of the highlights of 2004.



We were very excited to get back to broiler chicken production after taking 2003 off for the farm's relocation to Yamhill. We raised 2 batches of chickens - one in June and one in

October. Both batches sold out, and we heard many great things from our broiler customers about the taste and quality of our chickens. We were aided in our chicken pick-ups by our gracious site hosts in SE and SW Portland - many thanks to Betty and Janne and their families for allowing us space to set up on the pick-up days to meet customers and deliver their pre-ordered chickens safely into their hands.

Another new addition for 2004 were our first sheep. In April we purchased 5 Katahdin sheep, and we sold the meat from the two lambs in fall. This year we're planning to offer 7-8 lambs for sale - make sure to check out page 4 to learn more more about lamb and other meats we'll have available in 2005.

We added several new locations this past year to our Egg Drop delivery program, and also began a wonderful partnership with Shari Sirkin of Dancin' Roots Farm. In addition to offering our eggs through Dancin' Roots, we offered organic cherries from Cherry Blossom Farms as part of EggDrop. This year

we plan to maintain the same sites as last year, possibly add one or 2 more, and also offer an organic fruit share including a variety of fruits. More about our subscription program for 2005 can be found on page 2.

In addition to all the products we offered in 2004, we worked on the farm garden, added to our water catchment system, built hoopouses to shelter the animals, and started renovation of our pond. Several friends helped us install a culvert in late October as part of our pond restoration project, which we hope to complete by next fall.

For 2005 we will be adding cattle and pigs to our meat offerings, fruit shares to our egg subscription program, and an intern to our farm. We expect to have a very busy year, but we are greatly enjoying our beautiful place and the ability to provide our customers with quality products so we are looking forward to 2005 with much anticipation.

Please keep reading for more info about our meat and egg programs for 2005, as well as for articles about topics including gardens and water and organic farming. We thank you for your continued support of our farm and look forward to seeing you again this year!



Mark your calendars now...

Our 2005 Chicken Pick-up dates in Portland are scheduled for the following Saturdays...

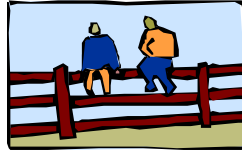
June 4th
August 6th
October 8th

June 11th
August 13th
October 15th

Chickens are processed and ready for your oven or freezer on the dates listed above. Customers can opt to pick-up their chickens at our farm on the Sunday *after* each pick-up day listed above.

Farm Musings: *Organic Thoughts*

by Rich Blaha



The word organic is an interesting one, thick with emotion and personal meaning for many people. Several years ago, the US Department of Agriculture waded into the fray, and tried to create a set of standards that would make everyone happy.

Now that there are national standards, there are limits to what can or can't be labeled 'organic.' For the most part, items labeled as such need to go through a certification process to assure that they meet the federal requirements. This is a great tool for the consumer shopping primarily in grocery stores, where there is no opportunity for you to see how things are grown firsthand. However, it does work against the small farmer who sells directly to you. While we could spend a lot of time, money and paperwork certifying our operation, wouldn't it be a lot easier if you just asked us? That is the beauty of a direct relationship between customers and farmers – the ability to ask questions of us, and, hopefully, to trust that we will tell you the truth!

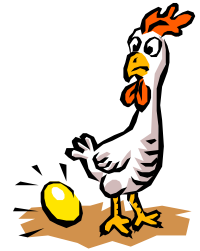
Currently, our priority on the farm is to avoid the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). We don't believe that enough research has been done on the long-term effects of GMOs on humans or on our earth's ecosystems, and so we choose to not use them.

Corn and Soybeans are nearly universally genetically engineered, unless they are certified organic. Because those are the principal ingredients in animal feeds, the 'foundation' of our feeding program for chickens (and soon to be pigs) consists of certified organic feed to avoid the GMO taint. The laying hens also enjoy some grain to scratch through, and this is provided by a farmer in Amity who is not organic, but does practice sustainable farming practices and grows non-GMO products. Again, instead of certifying, I just ask them, and they answer truthfully. This personal relationship mirrors the one we have with our customers— a face on the product is far superior than some text on a box, printed in a factory half a continent away.

We welcome questions about all aspects of our farm management...drop us an email at info@mossbackfarm.com

Egg Drop 2005

We were very pleased with the Egg Drop 2004 subscription program. We added sites in Forest Grove, NE and N Portland, and SW Portland, and were able to offer eggs at most sites through November. We also offered eggs for the first time through Dancin' Roots Farm and plan to do so again this year. (For more info about joining Shari's wonderful vegetable CSA, please contact her directly at sasfarm@hevanet.com)



At the end of 2004 we did some informal polling of our egg customers to find out how strongly they feel about continuing the use of organic and non-gmo feeds for our laying hens. Unlike other animals, chickens only get about 25-30% of their dietary needs from what the pastures provide, so we supplement with organic chicken feed and some non-organic (but non-gmo) oats. Unfortunately, due to the nature of world markets, the price of the organic feed has been steadily increasing.

In the informal poll, most customers said that they value the use of organic feeds fairly highly, so we plan to continue using organic feed and will raise the egg price just slightly to help cover the cost. However, the plus side is that we are keeping the same flock of layers that we had last year, so you can expect larger eggs this year!

In the spirit of uniting our customers with sustainably grown local produce, we also plan to offer organic fruit shares this year. For a one-time charge, customers who sign up for the fruit share will get strawberries, blueberries, cherries, peaches, and apples delivered seasonally with their eggs. Please see the Egg Drop flyer for further details about this.

In order to reducing both our driving time and our fossil fuel consumption, we will be doing all egg deliveries on Thursdays for 2005. We will continue to offer half shares as that proved fairly popular last year. We are also starting to offer a discount to customers who sign up for multiple seasons at one time, so look for details about that on the order form. Our Egg Drop order forms will be available in early February, and should will be available online at our website, www.mossbackfarm.com.





Rich's Landscape and Gardening Corner

Water on the brain (and in the garden)...

People who are not from Oregon have one unifying understanding of our climate....wet. What they forget, and we don't tell them, is that we have 3-4 months of near-desert conditions that make those months a real challenge for our gardens. Assuming we can keep something alive through the soggy soils of winter, we then add insult to injury by expecting them to thrive through several hot months lacking the water that drenched them all winter.

Fortunately, there are some strategies we can incorporate into our landscape plan that can make keeping our plants happy throughout the growing season.

First, group plants of similar water needs together so that when you do have to water, you don't have to run hither and yon with the hose, hitting individual plants. If your blueberries, rhododendrons, and azaleas are all near each other, you can just water the entire bed and be sure that all of the plants will appreciate the water.

Second, incorporate a drip irrigation system that will water the plants for you. Not only does it get rid of the hose mentioned above, but it frees you up to actually enjoy the garden, rather than be a slave to it. There are a wide range of options, allowing you to fine-tune the water delivery to each plant according to it's need.

Mulch and compost are the best friends to the gardener. Both will prevent the hot summer sun from drying out the soil, and will buffer the availability of nutrients to insure that the plants will have what they need, when they need it. Just be aware that mice and other varmints enjoy a good mulch layer, so make sure that they aren't taking too much advantage of your hospitality.

Depending on your site, well-designed earthworks can do wonders for water efficiency. A swale cut into a shallow slope on the contour will arrest any water from running off and create a spot downhill from it that will be far lusher than the area around it. We

have incorporated several swales into the farm, and will certainly add more of them as time goes on.

If you have any questions about these or other garden techniques, drop me an email at rich@mossbackfarm.com.

Chicken Chat

by Val Blaha



We had a very successful year with our broiler chicken production. We sold out both batches, heard lots of great feedback from happy customers who ordered broilers, and have lovely green pastures to show for the the presence of the chickens.

Although we were pleased with the chicken processor we used for the June chickens and also for last winter's stewing hens, we were overjoyed to find a new processor closer to us. Nels and Davina at Mineral Springs Poultry in Willamina did a wonderful job with the October chickens and also are able to cut the chickens up which allows us to offer our customers more choices for ordering. Their facility is licensed by the state and we were extremely happy with the quality of their facility and their work.

In order for customers to purchase and eat the chickens throughout the summer, we will be adding one additional batch to our production this year. We'll have chickens available in August, in addition to June and October. We plan to offer similar pick-up locations in Portland for 2005, and may also have pick-up available at the Hillsdale Farmers Market.

It's a good idea to order your chickens for June by late March to insure that we can reserve them for you. In fact, you can place your entire 2005 order all at once so you don't have to worry about forgetting to order those August and October chickens!



intern search!

We are looking to hire a farm intern this spring as we have found that the farm work has evolved beyond what the 2 of us can do. An internship description and application info are available on our website.

Sheep and Pigs and Cattle – oh yes!



As regular readers of our website might know, we got to experience the joys of 4-legged animal husbandry last year for the first time with the arrival of several Katahdin sheep. In October we had 2 lambs processed at a Carlton butchershop and the reports we've heard back from the folks who purchased the lamb have all been very positive.

This year we hope to have about 7-8 lambs for sale, as well as 1-2 steers and a few pigs. The sheep and cattle will be “grass-fed”, raised on our pastures without grain supplements. The pigs will be also be raised on our pastures and will supplemented with organic grains, vegetables and culled eggs. We are looking forward to being able to offer these additional humane and healthy meat products this year.

Cost will be approximately \$4-5/lb. We'll have minimum order requirements - for sheep and pigs it will probably be ½ of the animal. If you're interested, I'd 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 also at the Hillsdale Farmers Market and at our Egg Drop CSA sites. If you don't frequent any of those locations, drop us a line and we'll make sure you get an order form in the mail.

Food with Conscience

Rich and I are very conscious that eating well is not inexpensive. We try to price our products in a fair manner so that customers can afford them and so that we can earn a decent living from the farm.

However, I know that it is still very difficult for lower income families to afford to purchase the high quality products that we produce. For that reason, we periodically donate eggs to local Food Banks, including the Oregon Food Bank warehouse in Hillsboro and the food bank in McMinnville. Last year we donated over 100 pounds of eggs to the Oregon Food Bank, and we also donated eggs at the farmers markets that we participated in.

In addition to donating eggs to food banks, we also donated eggs to the Village Building Convergence, the

No on 36 Campaign, and EcoTrust's Autumn Graze event.

If you have an event or organization that could potentially benefit from a donation from our farm, please give us a call to discuss it. We enjoy contributing to good causes and would like to hear input from you, our customers, about opportunities to do more good in the future.

Gratitude Corner

Our farm business wouldn't be possible without all our loyal customers who buy our products. We are grateful for everyone who supports us with their food dollars.. In addition, there are some folks who go the extra mile to help us, whether by allowing us to use their porch for Egg Drop, talking up our eggs to their friends and neighbors, or providing support in other ways to our farm. We'd like to thank them here, and we encourage those of you who know these folks to give them a big hug next time you see them!

Rosemarie Cordello and David Sweet
Betty and Jon Shelley
Donna Trilli and Dave Smith
Erik Brakstad and Catherine Ciarlo
Liz Robinson
Adrienne and Scott Kringen
Julie and Jon Larson
Janne Stark and family
Holly Pence and Elliot Zais
David Merkoski and Jodi Jirsa
John Dvorsky and Rachel Kozdon
Andrea Marks
Daphne Pinsonet



Farmers Markets

If you visited the Eastbank Farmers Market last summer, or the Hillsdale Farmers Market this winter, you hopefully found our booth! We offer eggs for sale at the markets, and also take chicken orders.

While we're not positive yet what the summer holds for us regarding market participation, we do plan to be at the Hillsdale Winter Farmers Market through March. During February and March, the market will be open 10am to 2pm, on the 13th and 27th of each month. We'll probably be unveiling a new line of dog biscuits at the market in February so come down, say hi, and enjoy the bounty of the winter!

Mossbackers on the Cutting Edge!!

Our farm website went online last spring and we've had a good rate of traffic on the site. As part of the site, our very forward thinking friend/designer included a blog (short for web log) or online journal. Seeing as how 2004 was named "year of the blog" by various media outlets, we are pleased to have been on the front edge of the blogosphere. Regular website viewers know that they can find farm news, photos, and links to interesting articles and people on our farm blog which is the journal page on our website.

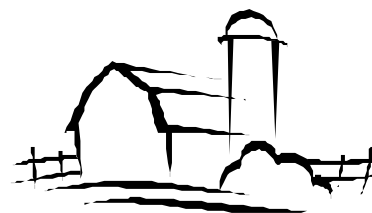


As always, we thank you for your support.
Please feel free to contact us!

We're planning some updates to our website for this year including adding photos throughout the site and enabling customers to access order forms online. In the future, we also hope to be able to have customers actually place orders and purchase items online.

We realize that not all our customers are online but we hope that our website is a helpful resource for people to learn about our farm and about issues related to sustainable agriculture. We also welcome feedback about how to make the site more user-friendly, so please feel free to send us some constructive criticism if you are so inclined!

www.mossbackfarm.com



Val and Rich Blaha
Mossback Farm

******New mailing address:**

PO Box 155

Yamhill, OR 97148

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

503-852-9585

info@mossbackfarm.com



Welcome, Farm Visitors!

We are often asked if we allow visitors to the farm and our answer is always a resounding yes!

We enjoy giving farm tours and talking with folks about how we raise our animals. Children especially enjoy the chance to see close-up the chickens who provide their eggs.

If you'd like to visit our farm, we just ask that you schedule a time and date so that we can make sure to be here when you come by, and to make sure that our dogs won't give you a surprise greeting.

We do live in wine country, and near the Evergreen Aviation Museum (home of the Spruce Goose), so if you have questions about what else to do on your visit out to Yamhill county, give us a call!

