

# Mossback Farm News

March 2009

Vol. 7 No. 1



## Greetings from the farm!

It's early March, and starting to feel a lot like springtime here on Mossback Farm! December's snows had us a bit worried for what the rest of the winter might hold, but we enjoyed a dry January and the recent February rains, and are hoping for a spring filled with showers and sunbreaks.

2008 was a pretty good year for the farm. Rich made a lot of headway on the fencing project, and hopes to complete the fencing of the primary pastures later this spring. Our steers did very well, and only escaped once or twice. One of those times was in the December snow, which was interesting to say the least. But with permanent fences combined with the electric wire, we're hoping our days of escapees will soon be in our past!

Our son Dalton turned 1 last May, and we had a small gathering of friends here to celebrate. He's now 21 months old, and is so much fun. He seems to love animals (as most toddlers seem to!) and he especially likes it when we make goat sounds.

Sadly, the last of our chickens didn't survive December's Arctic Blast, or at least the predators that came out after the thaw. We're looking forward to getting more hens this spring as we're so used to having eggs! Luckily, I have a friend from Tualatin who has been supplying us with eggs this winter. (You'll find her contact info, along with a couple of other newish farms, at the end of the newsletter.)

One of the hardest parts of 2008 was that I ruptured a disc in my lower back, necessitating surgery. Rich has been a trooper - not only does he do 100% of the farm work, but he also had to take over a lot of Dalton's care for a couple of months. Luckily, I'm doing much better, and hoping to make a full recovery.



## Mossback Farm Update – 2009 Plans

This year should bring the last of the conservation tree planting and the final big push of fencing work. We'll also be putting in an extension on the barn, and starting a water supply project, along with other random projects around the farm.

We're continuing to focus on beef as our main farm product and we'll have beef available by the quarter, half or whole steer in July and October. Our 2009 beef is selling fast, so if you are interested, please read on to learn about pricing and ordering.



## Beef available this summer and fall!

We are now taking orders for beef. Our cattle have been raised strictly on a grass/hay only diet (pasture during the growing season and hay in the winter). The meat is quite lean, and the flavor and consistency of the meat is excellent!

Prices are \$3.75/lb (hanging weight), plus processing for the beef. The end cost will be about \$5.75 per pound. Each quarter generally provides 75-100 lbs of meat.

Order have recently been coming in quickly and our supply is limited. If you are interested, placing an order is very simple - just [contact us](#) to confirm quantities still available, and send in your deposit to hold your order (deposit per quarter is \$150). The beef will be butchered by Frontier Custom Cutting in early July and late October, and will be ready for pick-up in Carlton in mid-July or early November.

## Farm Visitors and Volunteers - Welcome!



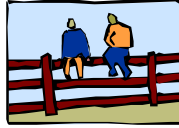
We love it when people visit our farm. If you have a desire to come out to the farm and get your hands dirty, or just take a tour and talk farming, conservation, land management, etc., give us a call or drop us an email to schedule a time to come on out.

We will have some short term projects for volunteers this summer, so if you'd like to camp or stay in our little travel trailer, that's certainly an option.

And don't forget that there is plenty to do in Yamhill county. Check out the Yamhill Valley Visitors Association (<http://www.yamhillvalley.org/>) to see what else our beautiful county has to offer.

## Farm Musings: *The changing landscape*

by Rich Blaha



It's sometimes hard to believe that we're starting our 7th year on this piece of property. In some ways, it seems like we've been here forever; the next moment, it seems like we just got here, and have a million tasks to do to get the farm where we want it to be. The nature of property management is such that it will never be exactly how you want it to be, regardless of time, resources, and sweat that you put into it...the best we can do is have a vision to work towards, and to tweak that vision as reality throws obstacles into the path.

One indicator of our tenure here is the ~3500 native trees that we've planted since we arrived. While there are places where the trees aren't thriving as well as I'd like (generally spots far from our usual walkabouts, and thus short on attention), most of them are well on their way to becoming a forest. Some trees started out knee-high when they were transplanted during our first winter here, and now they are 15ft tall. Those that were planted 4 years ago could be as tall as me by the end of the summer. As this nascent forest grows, it will provide shade and shelter to our ephemeral waterways, reducing evaporation and keeping more water on the land into the hot dry months. Deer and elk, squirrels and woodpeckers, will all show their appreciation for our efforts by taking up residence. A reward unto itself.



We recently connected with a woman who grew up on the property in the 1950's. It's been a real treat to talk to her about the history and character of the place, and to see pictures from that era which demonstrate the changes that time has wrought. Our forested valley was a lot more cleared back then, with long sightlines along pastures up into the hills. Times change, and as the homesteaders moved out, the tree farmers moved in to make their own way of living here.

The old barn that stood where our house does now, her old house (both long since burned down), the pastures that have been subjected to abuse and erosion through past mismanagement...a part of me is sad to see the loss that has resulted from negligent owners between her time and ours, but then a part of me is happy and excited to see how our stewardship has improved and transformed this little piece of ground.

Change also happens in our own lives...the character of the farm during our time here has changed from the daily racket of the hens, roosters, pigs, and sheep, to the more sedate cattle enterprise we run now. Still hard work, but not the constant running from task to task, trying to not get any farther behind. Now we still tend to play catch-up, but it's not as critical, and there's even time for those moments when we can ponder what *could* be next, as opposed to what *has* to be next.

And then there's Dalton, our 21-month old son. He's been a major addition, as well...as he grows up, I hope that he can appreciate the beauty and fragility of this piece of land, the satisfaction that comes from a wise hand in its management, and the joy of feeding his community from the fruits of that management. Hopefully, this place will help him experience all of that, and more.

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## Grass-fed beef: mmm, tasty! *Getting creative with casseroles*



When you order beef from us, you'll receive a wide range of cuts, including steaks, roasts, ground beef, ribs, etc. Most people don't need much help cooking steak. And we've shared some favorite hamburger and stew recipes in the past. But there's a lot of ground beef in a  steer, so I thought I'd share one of our favorite things to do with it... make a casserole!

Now, I think casseroles may have gotten a bad name in the past. True, they are not the most elegant of meals, but for a busy family, they can be great. One benefit of making a casserole is that you'll usually have leftovers, either for lunches or dinner the next night (or two!). Another benefit is that you can use just about any ingredients that you have on hand.

I like to think of casserole making as a way to be creative with ingredients. As long as you choose foods and spices that play well together, casseroles are pretty forgiving. And you can choose different types of cuisine as the inspiration for your casserole. Love Mexican cuisine? How about using onions, garlic, and tomatoes, along with some south-of-the-border seasonings? Craving Thai food? How about a Thai-themed casserole with coconut milk and curry.

I usually start with 3 basic ingredients – ground beef (1 lb), pasta, and cheese (skip the cheese if making a Asian cuisine-influenced casserole). I cook the pasta until al dente, drain and toss it with some olive oil or butter and salt (and sometimes ground pepper).

If I'm using onions, mushrooms and/or garlic, I'll saute them up in some olive oil, remove them from the pan, Then add the beef, plus spices and other ingredients that complement your casserole's theme – basil and oregano, diced fresh ginger, curry powder, tomatoes, vegetables, enchilada sauce, curry sauce, coconut milk, etc. Cook until beef is brown (don't overcook!)

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You can choose whether to combine the beef mixture with the pasta, or put them in 2 layers in the baking dish (pasta on the bottom). If using cheese or other toppings (green onions, etc.) put them on top. (Keep in mind that if you don't top the casserole with cheese, it's a good idea to cover with foil so it doesn't dry out.) Bake at 350F for about 20-30 minutes, and voila! A creative, yummy, nutritious homemade meal, tailored for your family's tastes!

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## Meet some farm friends...



One tradition we'd like to continue helping people make connections with others. We made several new friends this year who share our passion for growing good food. We encourage you to support them with your food dollars.

[Big Table Farm](#) (eggs, chicken, pork) - Clare Carver

On Nutrition Streit (eggs) - Kelly Streit  
503/692-1335, eatsmart@OnNutritionStreit.com

[Hope Springs Farm](#) (vegetables, chicken, eggs) -  
Jack and Caroline Murphy

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[www.mossbackfarm.com](http://www.mossbackfarm.com)...  
new and improved!

We're proud to be able to say that we have the longest-running farm blog in Oregon. Our website went up in Feb. 2004, with help from our good friend David Merkoski. Last year we decided it was time for an update, and Rich got the new site up and running using [Wordpress.org](#).

We've kept a similar look (including the tree that Val painted), but the site is much easier to update. One goal is to add more pictures throughout the site. And we're also trying to post at least once a week. If you've been following the blog, you'll note that we generally try to post on a wide variety issues relating to food and agriculture. In our daily lives, we come across a lot of interesting information that we think our customers, friends, and family would like to know, so we try to share it via the blog.

If you have any suggestions - whether it's topics you'd like to see covered, links to other sites, etc. - please feel free to drop us a line at [info@mossbackfarm.com](mailto:info@mossbackfarm.com).

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## Back by Popular Demand: *What Mossback Farmers are reading...*

A friend recently told us that she enjoyed the section that we used to include in our newsletters about books we'd recently read and enjoyed.



As probably happens to most new parents, we had a stretch of time where our reading time was extremely limited. But since we're both avid readers, we've persevered, and here's a list of books, journals and websites that have been educational, entertaining, or otherwise invaluable over the past year:

### books:

[Water Harvesting in Dry Lands](#) - Brad Lancaster  
[Farmers' Markets: Success, Failure, and Management Ecology](#) - Garry Stephenson  
[Fences for Pasture and Garden](#) - Gail Damerow

### journals:

*Capital Press* - general agriculture-related news  
*Stockman Grass Farmer* - technical and marketing info related to pasture-based enterprises

### websites:

[La Vida Locavore](#) - food and politics  
[Throwback at Trapper Creek](#) - homesteading, in detail  
[The Weather Café](#) - the best NW forecasts  
[Organic to be](#) - food and farming

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## Music anyone?



Val is still happily teaching private piano and guitar lessons. She's provides lessons downtown Hillsboro and downtown McMinnville. She's also available for performing piano music at weddings and parties, so if you know of anyone looking for live music at their event, or for inspiring and nurturing music lessons, please send them to Val's website: [www.valblaha.com](http://www.valblaha.com).

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*Wishing you and your family  
good health and good eating!*



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