

# Mossback Farm News

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## *Farm news and updates...*

Well, somehow the time rolled right on by last year, and we never did get around to sending out our annual farm newsletter. So this year we resolved to not put it off until spring, and instead to get it ready during the (sort of) quiet winter.

One bit of (old, but still exciting) news is that in 2011, we were named **Conservation Landowners of the Year** by the Yamhill County Soil and Water Conservation District. It was a great honor to be recognized for all the conservation work that Rich has done on our farm over the last 10 years. This work includes planting several thousand trees and shrubs in the riparian zones along our seasonal creeks (with help from many wonderful farm volunteers!), practicing intensive rotation of our animals to maintain the health and quality of our soil and water, and installing several innovative "gully plugs" to encourage retention of water along our creeks.

And speaking of 10 years, as of last November, last year we celebrated **10 years here at our location in Yamhill**. It's pretty neat to see the changes in the land since we first moved in. The "young" forest in the Back 20 has now grown to 30-40', and the new trees that have been planted along the seasonal creeks since we moved here are already 5-15 feet tall.

Another honor from 2011 was that we were recognized in the national Farm Service Agency newsletter for our **protection of habitat** for the endangered Fender's Blue Butterfly, and the threatened Kincaid's Lupine plant that provides food and shelter for the Fender's caterpillars. In 2012 we signed an agreement to set aside about an acre for habitat, and we are pleased to be part of the effort to bring back these species. Over the next few years we will be continuing to enhance the prairie habitat for these species, and we're formulating some pretty interesting research projects to learn more about this little-understood system.

2012 was a busy year for completing some projects on the farm. Rich finished his work on the **ram pump** – the gravity powered water pump that brings water from the creek to a storage tank. (The water is used for our steers). He also completed (with our son Dalton's help) a water system that allows us to easily get water to our many paddocks for our steers. And he completed work on the fencing system...to the degree that fencing is ever really done!

One fun addition in 2012 was the sound of **baby chicks**, not heard here in several years! Our son Dalton turned 5 last year, and is now old enough to help with a variety of farm chores. He picked out the 10 chicks, and took great care of them throughout the brooding period. Recently, he helped Rich rebuild the nest box for the chicken tractor, since we are due for the chicks (now 9 hens and 1 rooster, plus 2 more recently adopted hens) to start laying eggs within the next month.

We are continuing with our **grass-fed beef** production. This year, for the first time ever, we are raising our beef prices. We'll talk more about this below, but we think that our beef is still a great deal, especially compared to buying the same quantity by the cut at a market or farmers' market.

We appreciate all of our returning and new customers, and look forward to seeing and talking with many of you in 2013!

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## *Grass-fed beef...*

As we mentioned above, we are raising our prices for our beef this year. It's interesting – even though our operation is about as local as it can be (our steers and hay travel less than a mile to get to our farm), we are impacted by events such as droughts in the mid west which have impacted cattle prices.

In the past 2 years, **cattle prices** have risen by 40%. We aren't raising our prices by that much, but we are raising them by around 10-15%. Our Premium Summer beef shares will cost \$4.25/lb. We will have some very limited shares available at a

lower cost (\$3.50/lb) from the one Jersey steer that we are raising (the other shares will be from our Angus/mix steers). We will also be offering our Neighborly beef shares again this fall, depending on availability, and those will be \$3.75/lb plus butcher fees.

I'm often asked about the actual **per pound breakdown of the cost** of our beef. Since we sell by "hanging weight", this can be confusing to customers. I'm always happy to explain the final cost. Based on prices we recently found when we surveyed some Portland area natural food stores, and also some online farms, we found that the cost would be almost double if you bought the same quantity and cuts by the pound, instead of by the quarter share from Mossback Farm. Here are two tables with the prices for comparison.

<i>MBF beef</i>				
<i>Hanging weight</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Butcher cost</i>	<i>Total price paid</i>
180 # (estimate)	\$4.25/lb	\$765.00	\$125.00	<b>\$890.00</b>
<i>actual weight (25% less = subtract 45#)</i>				
135# / \$890			Final cost per lb:	<b>\$6.59/lb</b>

<i>Store- bought beef (by the cut)</i>			
<i>Actual weight</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Total price paid</i>
45#	\$5.99	\$269.55	
45#	\$12.00	\$540.00	<b>\$1,709.55</b>
45#	\$20.00	\$900.00	
<i>135# / \$1709.55</i>			
		Final cost per lb:	<b>\$12.66/lb</b>

Note that it is difficult to truly compare our beef with store-bought beef. Our beef is grass fed from birth to final finishing, and even so-called "grass fed beef" in the store is nearly always finished on grain for the final weeks of their lives. This eliminates the health benefits and the premium flavors of truly grass-finished beef.

If you're interested in buying a beef share this year, please see our Beef Share information sheet, and contact us ASAP to find out availability. Call us at 503 852 9585, or email at [info@mossbackfarm.com](mailto:info@mossbackfarm.com).

## **Resources...**

If you haven't already, check out the Whole Animal Buying Guide. We're including the link again this year because we think it's an excellent resource for people interested in buying larger quantities of meat.

[www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM2076.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM2076.pdf)

## **Friends doing great things...**

We are fortunate to have a lot of friends who own businesses – farms, restaurants, etc. It's fun to let our customers know about these great businesses so you might consider sending some love (and business!) their way.

**The Rib Cage** – This restaurant in Pacific City is owned by our friends Chenin and Sean Carlton. Chenin and Sean owned a small farm in Amity before starting a wine business. Now they own and operate their wine bar (Twist), as well as a great gift store (they even screen their own shirts!) Check out their trio of businesses the next time you are at the beach!  
<http://www.facebook.com/TheRibcageSmokery>

**Earth Oven Pizza** – This Hillsboro restaurant is located in downtown Hillsboro. They make pizzas in their beautiful wood-fired oven, and they also offer wine, beer, salads, and even breakfasts (pizzas and waffles), as well as live music every day. Val performs there on a regular basis. <http://earthovenpizza.com>

**Velvet Monkey Tea Bar and Shop** – If you are looking for tea or chocolate, stop in this basement shop on Third Street in downtown McMinnville. They offer an amazing array of tea... you can get some to sip, and also buy tea (they sell by the ounce) for home enjoyment. <http://www.velvetmonkeytea.com/>

**Mudjoy Farm** – We just met these guys recently... they have a CSA farm in Dayton, and grow very interesting vegetable varieties. If you're looking for veggies, considering supporting this new farm. They are also at a couple of farmers' markets in the Portland area... for more information, check them out at <http://mudjoyfarm.wordpress.com>

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## *Mossback Music...*

Val continued to focus extensively on music performance and teaching in 2012. She played several gigs a month solo or with her band Top Hands, and with other musical friends. Venues included wineries, restaurants, farmers' markets and private parties.

Songwriting was another focus for Val this year, and she self-released her first solo CD in August. The CD is available at [www.valblaha.com](http://www.valblaha.com), and also at her upcoming performances.

Val has a lot of performances scheduled for 2013, and is taking bookings for private parties, wineries, etc. Drop her a line at [music@valblaha.com](mailto:music@valblaha.com) if you want to find out more.

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

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