

2014 Mid February 2014 Update

From: Tom Barthel

Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2014 8:54 PM

To: Tom Barthel (snakeriverfarmer@gmail.com) <snakeriverfarmer@gmail.com>

Subject: Post Rendering Days, Mid-February 2014 Update

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Customers

Thanks to all who visited the farm on the two Rendering/Bobsledding Days.

We had a great time on both days. I believe you did also.

I and several of you, posted photos on our facebook page.

Link to our Facebook page.

[Snake River Farm Minnesota on Facebook](#)

Thank you to all who volunteered time and expertise to help.

I counted them up. Twenty people not counting Gail, Sarah or me, put in a lot of time to make those days good for you.

I especially thank Bethany and Nick Orton, the young couple who own and run Quality Meats. They brought samples and spent each day talking to customers about meat processing.

A frequent complaint by other farmers at conferences I attend is the shortage of good butcher shops.

We (and you) are fortunate to have Nick and Bethany working for us.

They listen and they work hard to provide the special products you want.

Also, special thanks to Phyllis who volunteered a lot of time both here and at her home preparing the very popular soup and broth demonstrations.

Tom Corbin, a childhood through high school friend, was here last Saturday. He is not a customer but his family members are.

We grew up on neighboring dairy farms in Otsego.

Tom came along on a bobsled ride. He mentioned that the last man he saw drive a team of horses was Frank Rabishaud.

Frank and his brother Joe farmed near us in Otsego. They were old men when we were boys.

I remember Frank driving his steel wheeled tractor home along the gravel road that is now the four lane Highway 101.

Old Frank was on his way home from the final threshing location of the summer. Probably 1950 or 51.

We were no longer threshing on our farm.

My father and his brothers pooled farm machinery. We owned a small McCormick combine.

The word "combine" means to combine the reaping and threshing of the grain into one operation.

Before combines, farmers would reap and bundle the grain stalks and stack them in the fields. Days later, in a separate setting, a crew of men, horses and machines would get together to "thresh" the grain.

You can see and learn about that at many summertime threshing shows.

In fact I posted a photo on our facebook page a couple summers ago of Saul throwing bundles into the thresher at the Nowthen show.

There were still a few threshing crews in the country in the early 50s.

Frank and his ancient tractor crawled along so slow it seemed to take hours for him to traverse the ½ mile of road that I could see from our farmyard.

Frank and Joe retired from farming a year or two later.

They had a fine team of black work horses.
Huge horses that knew their jobs and work willingly.
Pa had a newer Ford tractor. He had sold our horses a couple years before.
I always liked horses. I missed ours.
On the day of the Rabishaud farm auction, I stood in the barn near the horse stalls, a little boy in a crowd of men.
I can still smell those horses. A good smell.
I remember how badly I felt as the auctioneer tried and failed to get a \$100 bid for those two good horses and all their harness.
It was about 1952 and the end of the work horse time.
By the mid 1950s, it was rare to see a horse anywhere in central Minnesota.

**The next event will be Spring Farm Day, Saturday May 17.
Mark that date on your calendar.**

Today was the warmest day of the year and the first day that really felt spring like.
We still have a winter's worth of snow to melt and perhaps a few more winter storms coming.
Nevertheless, the sun is getting higher in the sky; the days are getting longer and today was a fine day to work outside.

The bison, cattle and horse herds are all coming through the winter in good condition.
I hauled a dozen big round hay bales to the bison on the south end of the farm this morning.
It took some hours because I needed to plow trails through a mile of snow drifts.
The bison were playful. They ran laps around the new bales.
The snow is deep and they purposefully kicked up as much snow as they could.
The young bulls ripped into the bales with their horns.
Just for the fun of it.
At times like that I feel a tiny bit guilty. I imagine many people would think it the scene of their life to watch buffalo play.
Every day here has incredible scenes.

All the animals get playful and full of energy as spring nears.
The horses express their exuberance by racing and fighting.
They have plenty of room but they delight in racing through the savanna where they can shoot among and around the trees.
Ten horses can kick up a lot of snow.
The fighting is mostly play but even when playing, mustangs put on a fantastic show.

Sarah posted an easy technique for rendering lard recently.
[RENDER LARD IN YOUR KITCHEN OVEN, NO SMOKE.](#)
Gail and I used her 170 degree oven technique with a few twists.
It works great.
I will send a separate letter about that with photos.

I am also working on a number of letters about animal handling and welfare.
Coming soon. Really.

A week or so ago, I attended a grass-fed beef cooking class. The instructor was a **cook named Mary Jane Miller**. Some of you may know her. Her resume says she appears on KSTP TV and that she writes on cooking for the TASTE section of the Minneapolis paper.

I was able to ask many questions during, and then after the class.

The advice I have been giving you about cooking grass-fed beef and pastured pork is good.

Mary Jane and I agreed on all points.

One slight difference. She recommends cooking pork to an internal temperature of only 130 degrees before removing from the heat.

She is very strong on having a digital thermometer and using it. She says; use it until you get a good feel for cooking and internal temperatures.

Remember, there is a lot of good information on cooking these low fat meats on Sarah's blog.

I am hereby nagging you about placing your 2014 order.

Do it!

You can always change or cancel it before harvest.

Best possible regards.

Tom

p.s. I am off to Alexandria for another soils conference tomorrow.

What a life.