

2015 Mid August Update

From: SNAKE RIVER FARM

Sent: Monday, August 17, 2015 10:40 PM

To: Tom Barthel <Tom@snakeriverfarmmn.com>

Subject: Mid-August Update, 2015

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Customers

The super growing weather continues.

Some of these days are awfully hot and muggy for humans but plants experience high humidity, heat, and sunshine all together differently.

Fall harvest started last week.

I harvested eight beef last week as planned.

This week I intend to harvest ten more beef and two bison.

Next week will be similar.

Nick and Bethany Orton own and operate Quality Meats.

Many of you know Bethany and Nick from meeting them at their butcher shop and from gatherings here.

On harvest days, normally Wednesday, I pasture harvest eight animals, two at a time, and deliver them to Quality Meats.

Josh is usually the guy who does the actually butchering in Foley.

It takes two hours per round trip.

Four trips, along with normal chores and clean-up, add to a full day.

Thursday morning I returned to Foley so that Nick and I could examine the carcasses.

Nick and the Internet, are teaching me how to evaluate the physiological age of a beef carcass.

It turns out that chronological age and physiological age are not always the same.

Physiological age relates to tenderness.

USDA inspectors and everyone else for that matter, use cartilage ossification as the indicator for physiological age.

The best way to do that is to examine the tips of the posterior vertebral processes. That is the back of the spine (the highest part).

Younger animals have more cartilage there.

As cattle age the cartilage gradually turns to bone.

I intend to examine every carcass in the future.

That might help us avoid the occasional "tougher" carcass.

A physiologically older animal could be converted to roasts or ground meat instead of cuts.

We will see.

That was not exactly my reason for getting onto this topic however.

On Wednesday when I brought your eight beef in, another farmer also brought in a corn fed beef.

The nine animals, quartered, were all hanging in the refrigerated room.

Corn produces a hard white fat.

Grass produces yellow fat with a lower melting temperature.

That effect is similar on other meats and eggs.

For example, hens on pasture produce eggs with bright, yellow-orange yolks.

The difference in the appearance of the hanging beef carcasses was striking.

Your beef had less fat of course, but it was a rich, golden fat.

On the way home, I realized I should have taken a photo.

Next time.

The cattle last week ran about 100 pounds larger than normal.

One enormous heifer hung at 860 pounds.

That is the largest animal we have ever produced for cuts.

There may be a couple more that big.

Even so, the carcass carried much less fat than the corn fed beef.

On Wednesday when I selected the animals for harvest, I expected seven to be right for cuts, and one to be right for the Roast Option.

That is just how it turned out after carcass inspection.

All eight looked very good.

The beef this week will come from Sarah and Jordan's farm.

The pastures there have been terrific.

No doubt these will be excellent beef also.

The ducks will be harvested next Monday.

The following Friday, August 28 I will resume weekly deliveries, with a special effort to deliver ducks.

So far, I do not believe we have lost a single duck or goose.

The ducks and geese are pastured together with a pond.

Their pasture is surrounded by electric mesh to keep ground predators away.

Eagles perch above them frequently but apparently they are only dreaming.

When raptors are near, the ducks get perfectly still, taking shelter under a bush or in the tall grass.

The geese go wild honking and scolding.

That may be some protection.

Geese are aggressively territorial.

They give every indication they would fight the eagles.

JoLynn sent a link to an article.

The article features NorthStar Bison and the Graese family.

We know them well. Lee Graese and I served on the Minnesota Buffalo Association Board together.

You may recall that we are hosting the National Bison Association summer conference next June.

I have asked the Graese's, who have their own abattoir, to do a side by side, bison-beef carcass cut down at the conference.

The conference will be based in Elk River. The attendees will spend one day at our farm.

It is a good article in many ways. Read it if you have time.

From JoLynn.

"Hi Tom,

Saw this post today from one of my favorite traditional, real food bloggers. Thought you might be interested.

<http://nourishedkitchen.com/grass-fed-bison/>

JoLynn"

I get feedback from a number of you each week but I thought it cute that two of you, on the same day, used the word "heaven" to describe experiences with our meat.

I do not claim, "Heavenly," but certainly do appreciate the compliment.

From Marla.

"I marinated our first-ever grass fed steaks from you and grilled them. They were AWESOME! My husband was in heaven!"

From Norbert.

"Last week I cured our ham. It has been in our freezer taunting me since late last year. On Saturday I smoked it. Needless to say, the whole family is in hog heaven."

Summer is ending soon. I have mixed feelings about that. So do you no doubt.

On Sunday a neighbor who has tons of apples called and invited us to pick up all we wanted. They are scooping the wormy ones off the ground and feeding them to their dairy cows.

Sarah, Gail, Hazel, and I went over and got about six, five gallon pails full.

Gail peeled sliced and froze many Sunday night but I think I am tired from apple picking.

Gail said that too many of my apples had worms.

Yesterday, cousin Tom's wife Peggy called and invited us to pick sweet corn.

They grow terrific sweet corn and sell it along 169 near Pease. Pease is between Princeton and Milaca. Cousin Tom does daily plantings in the spring. That way different corn rows will be ready each day in season.

Nevertheless, there is always a time when the corn gets ahead of him and that is where we come in.

We probably brought home 75 dozen.

Gail has me cutting corn off the cobs during breaks in writing this letter.

I suspect she will work on corn all night, blanching, bagging, and freezing.

We will have delicious corn for another year.

I hope things are going well for you.

Ask if you have questions about your order.

Best regards.

Tom

p.s. There are chickens available at Quality Meats. Call Nancy 320 968 7218

p.p.s. If you have pork or beef or bison by the cut on order, you should have already called Nancy to set-up your processing instructions.

If not, do it this week. It will be much harder to get Nancy's time later.