

Back Forty Acres, LLC

Winter Newsletter

January 2008

Greetings to all from Back Forty Acres. We hope this letter finds you healthy and happy. Can you believe we are starting another year? Time seems to fly by when you're on the business end of a pitchfork!

First and foremost a giant thank you to all our friends who purchased products from us this past year. We truly hope you enjoyed them. We take great pride in ensuring that you get the very best we can produce. It warms our hearts when people call us to say how they fixed something and how good it was. So thank you very much, we do greatly appreciate it.

For those of you new to Back Forty Acres, allow us to explain who we are and what we do. We have been raising food for several years on our own at the family's centennial farm. Our families eat meat and poultry products which are better tasting, good for you and raised in a humane way. Our feed has no chemicals, no antibiotics, no growth hormones. Poultry are in large portable pens which are moved daily on pasture, allowed them to breath the fresh air and enjoy the sunshine, supplementing their feed with bugs. Goats and sheep romp around in close to 20 acres, grazing on grass and clover. When friends began asking for some of our products, we expanded a bit. And word of mouth has taken over from there!

And what can you expect from us this year? Well with any business, some things stay the same while others change. Lots of new things to talk about in this newsletter.

New Product - Pork

We've recently purchased two types of pigs: Tamworth and a Hampshire/Duroc cross.

The Tamworth is a very old breed originating in Ireland and developed further in England. It was primarily used as a "bacon hog", that is to say it is a leaner-type hog and not one of the larger fatter breeds which in those days were raised for their fat content which was rendered down to make lard, widely used for all types of cooking and what not. The Tamworth hog was raised for its bacon qualities along with leaner cuts of meat. It is a good pasture hog, one that thrives on grass and forage. The Tamworth was brought to Canada in the 1800's and a little later imported to the U.S. The Tamworth is a red colored pig with a long body and stout legs. They really know how to use their snout - just look at their paddock! We have great expectations for these pigs, so much so that we bought enough to keep a few back for our own breeding stock.

We have also purchased a few Hampshire/Duroc pigs. For those who want a more traditional type of pork product, these pigs will have more fat content and will be a little larger in size. They will grow faster than the Tamworths but we expect them to be just as good.

The main reason pork tastes the way it does is how you raise it. We will feed them the same way as the broilers: No hormones, antibiotics or growth steroids. They will be able to get out and play, root around and just enjoy being a pig.

New Product - Heritage Turkeys

We have been getting some inquiry on these birds and it is a product that we want to have available for you. The definition of a heritage turkey is one that has not been altered in a lab, a breed from our past that once made up the lions share of turkey breeds. It's allowed to grow slowly and naturally and, no kidding here, it's able to breed naturally, that is to say no artificial insemination. Heritage breeds were phased out so to speak by the production of the large white turkey in the 1950's. (White turkeys are the ones you see in the stores, the birds developed to grow fast and big so commercial markets could be filled.) Heritage turkeys are a quality bird that needs to be raised correctly, which means in small groups on pasture, fed non-altered grains, given fresh water and allowed to scratch for bugs and

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enjoy the sunshine. Today's mass-produced birds see none of this. We look forward to having some of these heritage birds available for you at Thanksgiving time. Probably no sooner because of the length of time it takes them to grow to full size. But I'm sure they'll be worth the wait. We'll have two breeds: Bourbon Red and Narragansett. Both are acclaimed to be excellent eating birds. Whereas the average weight of our pastured-fed white turkeys was 20 lbs, we're told that both of these heritage birds will average about 16-18 lbs dressed. Time will tell!

Changes at the Farm?

Well, the biggest change will be the hoop house. What is a hoop house you say? Well, it's a livestock producer's name for a greenhouse. We are constructing one for the laying hens and the rabbits to be housed. The chickens will have the run of the floor space while the rabbit cages will be suspended from the rafters of the house. This will allow the chickens to scratch through whatever the rabbits drop from their cages. Not only is this an economical factor but is also a biological factor. When the chickens scratch the ground under the cages looking for bugs to eat, it aerates all the material there, turning it into wonderful compost for the gardens. Nothing like having the chickens do all the work and we get a great product out of it too.

Another change involves our egg operation. We have always been able to sell eggs from the farm, but wanted to expand to farmers markets, retail stores and restaurants. So we built a room in the barn that would comply with the Michigan Dept of Agriculture's regulations for proper egg handling. We have received our license from the MDA, passing the exam with flying colors!

Finally, we've added another breed of goat to our pasture of Boer goats. "Wilson" is a Kiko, a goat breed developed in New Zealand for its hardiness and meat production. His sole purpose will be breeding. We had Wilson out in the pasture this fall, observing and learning from the experienced Boer bucks, in preparation for next year.

The "Everything Else" Section

Pastured Broiler Chickens: Again three batches, one each in June, August and October. The exact days will be figured out later and we will let you know as soon as possible. Just like last year, they will be raised in portable pens which are moved daily across the field, so that the chickens can enjoy the fresh air and, along with our natural feed, a good sampling of bugs for their diet. The portable pens worked perfectly. We expect to build a few more pens in 2008 to handle the additional birds (both chickens and turkeys) we are planning for.

We had great success with these birds; absolutely everyone we talked to really enjoy them. They averaged just over 4 lbs in 2007, ranging from 2-1/2 lbs to a few at 6-7 lbs. Expect the same in 2008. And remember that when the last batch in October is gone, that's it for the year. We do not raise them year-round as the pastures are either dormant or covered with snow. This is strictly a seasonal product so please order accordingly. If you need some between October and June just order enough to stock the freezer. That's what we do.

Pastured Turkeys: As I mentioned above we will be trying out two heritage breeds along with the standard white turkeys. If there is enough interest in white turkeys for summer time (some could be ready in August), we'd be happy to raise them. Please indicate that on your order form. Size most likely will range 12-26 lbs. We can't guarantee a particular size of course, but let us know what you're looking for and we'll do our best to get the right weight to fit the size of your family.

Fresh Brown Chicken Eggs: Eggs are available all year long. The quality is so much better than store-bought eggs. They're fresh and you know where they come from.

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Lamb: At first you folks didn't beat down our doors for lamb, but by the time they were ready to go, the interest really peaked. We even sold some that we were planning on keeping ourselves! I hope everyone who really wanted some got some. We raised Cheviots last year but we think we'll try a different breed in 2008. We were not impressed by the attitude of the Cheviots; they were very flighty and easily spooked. In 2007 hanging weight averaged about 60 lbs, but may be a bit different with the different breed. Expect lambs to be ready late October.

Goat: Well, we have used a couple different bucks for this year's kid production and the Does are scheduled to start delivering in February. We look forward to another excellent kid crop. If you haven't tried goat, give us a call and we'll get a sample out to you, along with a recipe or two. (Our goat curry recipe will knock your socks off!) It really is very good tasting, similar to lamb. And it is good for you too, being high in protein and very lean. These animals are raised solely on grass, clover and hay. They have large areas to graze and run around in. This helps with the natural health of the animal. Don't want a whole or even a half goat? That's ok, we will sell certain cuts individually so you can try this product. Goat is available almost anytime; let us know what & when.

Pork: Although we have raised pigs on our own before, this a new product for Back Forty Acres. You'll like what we have to offer. Get your order in soon, as we have limited quantity in 2008.

Rabbit: There has not been a huge demand for rabbit, which we can't understand. Rabbit meat is an underrated product. It is low in cholesterol and fat and high in protein. It is all white meat with very fine bones. Not much is lost on waste so it's a good product for the money. Maybe too many people think of the Easter bunny when it comes to eating rabbit? I think of rabbit stew on a cold winter's day!

Stewing Hens: When a laying hen no longer produces what she was designed to do, it's time to replace her. When you think of chicken and dumplings or a pot of chicken soup, what do you see? Well, we see a hen that has had time to grow into a very nice sized bird and has developed great tasting meat. We see no reason to waste this opportunity. That is why some layers are considered a dual purpose bird. Once their egg production is done, they now move to the meat side of the coin. These birds, slow cooked in a crock-pot, are an absolutely wonderful dish. The meat falls right off the bone, the juice makes a wonderful broth for soups or anything else you need chicken broth for and it's fresh and very flavorful. We will likely have some available this summer as our flock of Wyandottes reaches their end. So as we continue the egg production we will have more opportunities to offer these little treasures to you. You can freeze or can them. They store well and last a long time.

Goose/Duck: Well what can we say? We offered this opportunity last year with only two takers. Unfortunately we have to order more than just two to have the ducklings or goslings safely shipped to us. Be that as it may, we will offer these up to you again this year. Lots of people don't know what to do with a duck or goose but let me tell you from experience they are wonderful. We have raised them in the past for our own families and they get rave reviews. The sight of a roasting duck or goose in the oven takes you back to the days of Charles Dickens with Tiny Tim slowly turning the handle of the spit over an open fire and a goose turning the most wonderful shade of golden brown you'll ever see. Yummy. Ok not fair but what the heck, you've got to love the classics!

Beef: Well, we had hoped to get into this soon. But with all the talk about micro-chipping cattle and what not, we are waiting to see how it plays out. Beef can be an important part of our farm but we don't want to get started until we understand what new regulations the powers-that-be will be imposing on beef production.

Well those are the products for this year. If you have any questions about them, please feel free to contact us and we'll try to answer it the best we can.

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Now on to the Editorial Part of Our Show

When some people find out what were doing here, their question is why. Why don't you just go to the store and buy a chicken? Why would I pay \$12.00 for a chicken when the store has one for \$4.00? We believe that your health is directly affected by what you eat. If you eat fast food everyday you'll need to go to the lumber yard and buy bigger doors for your house. If you eat prepackaged meals all the time you won't get the opportunity to eat something that hasn't been pre cooked then flash frozen. Don't get me wrong. I don't eat just things that I raise. I don't think anyone really could unless they cut themselves off from society. But to never experience real food, fresh food, food raised in accordance to how nature designed it to be raised, food that won't be recalled because it went in the same grinder with 10,000 pounds of e-coli meat, is a crying shame. We know that when we pull a chicken out of our freezer or goat or lamb or whatever, we don't have to don a hazmat suit or spray down the kitchen with antibacterial soap. We just thaw it out, rinse it off and cook it.

The reason the chicken police are out there in the first place is because of today's modern factory farms. That's where the bugs take hold. When you raise 10,000 chickens in an enclosed house you're going to have problems, plain and simple. Animals raised in CAFO's (concentrated animal feeding operations) do not have the same luxury. Whether it's a beef, poultry or hog CAFO, it's all the same. They are held on concrete or slats and fed grains full of "supplements" to make them grow faster than their bodies can handle or to keep them from dying on the spot. (Although how would you know if they were dead; I don't think there's enough room for them to fall down!) It should make you mad as hell to have these meat products in our American markets!! With our style of farming we know that our animals are raised in a healthy environment, are tended to daily and are raised in a humane fashion that allows them the quality of life they deserve. We offer them an opportunity to thrive and prosper, albeit for a short time, but a happy existence none-the-less.

When the food business became "big business" things changed. Food was no longer something to take pride in or to relish over. It was dollars and cents: How do we do this for less? How do we make more money? Hey, let's face it. We all want cheap food. Well we got it, but at what cost? We get higher medical bills, more diseases popping up all the time, not to mention obesity. People don't know where any of their food comes from anymore. And they say this is progress?

Well that's why we do what we do at Back Forty Acres. We can't supply you with all the food you'll ever need but we can help with some of it. Why trust us? Take a look in our freezers and you'll see the same things in there that we're selling to you. We believe that we can make a difference in our health with products raised our way. And it is definitely better eating. Thanks for reading; we'll put the soapbox away until next time.

In Conclusion...

Well, that's about it in an nutshell. We look forward to another great year of providing our friends with good quality food. We will continue to be ecologically friendly and treat our animals humanely. Sustainable agriculture is our goal and each and every one of you plays a part in making it happen. Thank you very much from your friends at Back Forty Acres.

Kevin & DeAnn Doll

Larry & Stephanie Doll