



Farm News - April

Part of the morning "chores" involves training the beef calves to come when they are called. With a pail of their favourite treat (oats) I start their lesson by stepping into their pasture calling "come boss! come boss!". If the boss cow comes, all the rest will follow. A couple of months back they would have all ran away. Now the moment I call them, they all start running towards me.

I used to spread the pail of oats in the trough as a reward but now I make them follow me as I lead the herd around the pasture. Finally I give them their hard earned treat (around a cup of oats per animal). When the animals learn to come when they are called, the amount of stress in their lives is greatly reduced. A well behaved cow never needs chasing.

This learned behaviour came in handy the other day when I noticed the tractor I was using to bring them hay had accidentally caught their fence wire, ripping down their entire fence. The next thing I noticed were all the calves running down the county road. After an hour I had the fence repaired but by then the cattle were half a kilometre away. What to do? Call "Come Boss! Come Boss!" Five minutes later they were all back behind the fence.

"Buttercup" the milk cow has been such a pleasure to have around. Every morning she gives us a gallon and half of fresh, delicious milk. We share her udder with "Daisy", her month old calf. In order for Buttercup to have milk in the morning, we have separate the two the night before. Daisy had learned that when I walked into their pasture in the evening, it was time to play "catch me if you can", (not what I have in mind). She got really good, and fast! At the end of the day, this was not what I want to be doing. But now, thanks to some neighbourly advice, I have the edge. With the addition of a long rope to her halter she stops running instantly the moment I say "stop" (and step on the rope). I then walk on the rope up to the calf and reassure her by petting her. If properly trained, Daisy will grow up to be a perfect milk cow, just like her mother.

"Joe" the donkey has been a bachelor for most of his life. Last November I purchased two jennies and the three of them have been having donkey conversations (through the fence) ever since. I kept them separated for fear that the eleven month pregnancy would end on a freezing winter day. (Joe was born in the winter and had the tips of his ears frozen). With spring here Joe's life of celibacy is just about to end. Within the next few minutes, the fence which keeps them apart is about to come down.

Jerry