



Farm News - April

YouTube Farming. SLOW FOOD Canada, an organization I've supported for the past 10 years, held its annual meeting in Osoyoos, B.C. this month. I really wanted to attend but leaving the farm is always a hard thing to do. My son said he'd be around and I had 3 very capable WWOOFers so I felt comfortable leaving for the five days. After all, what could go wrong? I knew the answer to that question. Anything! And I was right. There were all kinds of unexpected events that took place and they handled them quite well but then there came a phone call with an emergency. A cow had calved during the night but the calf was weak and looked like it was going to die. I knew that the calf needed milk right away and the best way to get the milk into the calf was an esophageal feeder (a tube direct to the stomach). But how do you explain to someone over the phone the correct procedure. If you do it wrong the milk can go into the lungs and drown the calf. The answer: YouTube! Sitting on my hotel balcony, 1200 km away, I found a site that had a good video and emailed the link to them. Two hours later the calf was up and nursing.

Willy the boar is certainly a changed pig. The new boar arrived last month as a nervous wreck from a conventional pig barn. Now Willy has become my best buddy out in the pig pasture. When I call his name he often will come to my side and greet me in his pig way. Not always though. He has a number of lady friends to distract him. So "Willy" is good story and sad story at the same time. Good because he now has freedom and can express himself and all his piggy behaviour. Sad because he is just an ordinary pig that had a lucky break. The rest of the pigs from his home won't have that chance. And that's just one barn. Canada produces 13.8 million pigs per year. The US 65.9 million and China 446.4 million. (2008 United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization)

I support organizations like the BC SPCA and other groups that try to make a difference in the lives of farm animals. Our pigs, chickens, turkeys and cattle have been SPCA certified for the past six years and this month I filled out the papers for another year. The inspector arrives in June.

Expect the unexpected. (Farm Motto) It was a Sunday and we had an invitation out for roast beef dinner. Sunday is also the day I catch pigs for market. Catching pigs before the dinner would allow time in the evening for visiting. Half an hour later I had seven pigs in the back of my trailer. "That went well" was my thought when I pulled into the yard, looking forward to a shower. With "dinner" on my mind I walked toward the house. The last thing I expected to see were the pigs hopping off the trailer into the yard. I had forgotten to latch the trailer door. At that point I knew I was going to be late. The pigs however did not care. They were exploring uncharted territory. What to do? Get some string!

Fortunately our animals are trained to electric fences and don't like touching them to see if the power is on. With the help of Jan from Germany and Marlis from Italy, we walked behind the pigs with the string tight and kept them moving towards the trailer. Once they got close they realized that someone has dumped a pail of pig food inside the trailer. Pigs are pigs when it comes to food and that was all it took to get them hopping back on the trailer.

Dinner? We were five minutes late.

Every once in awhile "expecting the unexpected" involves a pleasant surprise. That was certainly the case when we peaked into one of the Berkshire sow houses and saw that overnight she had given birth to seventeen babies. Jerry