



Farm News from August

The time has come for the laying hens to give up laying eggs in the chicken coop. "Every time I lay an egg, someone steals it!" (That someone would be me). The goal of the hens is not to provide nutrition for the humans but to start a new family. To do so they must lay an egg every day or so and when they figure the nest is large enough, they sit on the eggs, keeping them warm. Twenty one days later the chicks hatch out.

So now some of the chickens have smartened up and rather than laying them in the chicken coop, they find new spots like under the porch or in the storage shed. Just because they start a nest doesn't mean they will finish it. That's an instinct which unfortunately has been lost in most chickens. Occasionally we stumble across these abandoned nests. The last thing you would want to do is collect those eggs for eating. It's hard to tell if the nest is a few days or a few months old. We've found nests from last year. The old eggs go rotten and under great internal pressure, these bombs can burst with the slightest movement which occasionally has made parts of the yard unapproachable for days.

The other day I noticed that one hen was missing. She may be the one who will start the next generation of chickens. I wish her luck.

Jack the dog has got his own chicken routine. I was sitting on the porch when a chicken walked by and hopped into the dog house. Looking for food maybe? Then Jack the dog gets up and wanders over to the doghouse and sticks his head in, patiently staring at the chicken. That seemed out of character since he normally pays no attention to the chickens. A few minutes later the hen hops out and Jack goes inside the dog house. That was even more unusual. Jack never goes inside his dog house. Then there was a crunching sound and out comes Jack with egg on his face.

Willy and Johnson, our two young boars have hopefully learned some lessons from "Old Faithful". When I realized the two young guys were not up to breeding I turned the old boar in with the sows. Now, three months later I have around twenty sows who are very pregnant. This month there should be lots of new pigs on the farm. This however is going to present a few challenges. In a few months I will have a shortage of pigs to sell because of the missed breeding cycles. The stores that buy the pork will have customers complaining that there is no organic pork so the store will want to look for other suppliers. Meanwhile, back on the ranch, the fine balance of cheques and bills will start to tip. At that time there will be an abundance of young pigs from the twenty sows who are growing and demanding lots of food (more bills). Then when they are ready for market, the market will say "we're OK for pork" presenting even more challenges.

That's when I hope the magic will kick in. Magic? Over the many years I've raised pigs there have been several ups and downs in production (often caused by moody boars). When I've had little to sell the phone would ring "Cancel the next two weeks, the butcher's on holidays" or the plant would call "we can't process next week." Then when I've had a surplus of pigs and wondered "what am I going to do with all these pigs?" I would get calls "can I buy a side of pork?" or "we have a shortage, do you sell organic pork?" Magic?

Even more amazing is that for all the years I have raised pigs, I have never had to sell pork to the commercial market. Of the thousands of animals who have left this farm, every one has gone to the home of someone who has wanted organic pork.

Even the weatherman seems to be going in cycles. Last month the many predictions of sunshine turned to showers. This month the "chance of showers" have turned to sunshine. Finally we're getting a few nice bales of hay.