

## Farm News from April

What happened to the March Farm News? Unlike most occupations which have a time to start and a time to finish, work on the farm has no end. There is always work that needs doing, especially in spring with seeding is around the corner and with pigs farrowing and cows calving, the days get filled to the maximum. When I open the laptop with good intentions to write I find myself waking up a couple hours later with a sore neck. "I'll do it tomorrow".

Back in March the thermometer said minus 38 C, a little chilly to be outside. Even chillier if you are very pregnant and about to give birth.

We use no farrowing crates, heated barns, heat lamps, etc. The birthing process is left up to the sow and her instinct. We provide her with a eight by eight foot insulated house with a door of carpet, an insulated floor and most importantly, lots of good quality, organic straw. Although we're very curious and love seeing newborn pigs, we dare not open the doors to peek inside. Two reasons: we don't want to let in the cold temperatures and the disturbed sow could injure her piglets by getting up too quick. As the month progressed and the warmer weather returned the babies started exploring outside of the houses. Considering the extreme temperatures an average of almost seven piglets per sow was really good. Tissues off to those sows. And the piglets? Hardy, healthy and happy. They call that northern vigour.

Near Grande Prairie on Lake Saskatoon there is the annual "Swan Festival" which welcomes the return of the mighty Trumpeter Swan, the largest migrating waterfowl in the world. On the radio they mentioned there was a "chance" to even see the swans on the lake. I could hear swans calling as the radio was playing. How lucky we are with five beaver ponds within a mile of the farm. The swans fly over several times a day.

What do you see when you look out your window? Clothilde, a school teacher from France whose been WWOOFing on our farm since September has a habit of counting the number of species she can see as she sits having her breakfast. "What's the most?" I asked. "Seventeen!"

I've seen foxes in the neighbourhood but I had never saw one on our farm until just the other day. It was first light when I went to check the cows. When I climbed a small hill I was surprised to see the unsuspecting fox on the other side with his head in a mouse hole. I froze, watching him as he was digging and pouncing. I managed to sneak really close wondering if this would be the animal that would break my record of never having to shoot a predator. With over a thousand chickens about to hatch and then turkeys after that, the flavour of mice might loose its appeal.

Jasmine is starting to like Joe nibbling along her back. She is only a year old and a little young to be appreciating the affections of Joe, a 20 year old, intact donkey. I think they were both surprised when one time as Joe was displaying his sign of affection with Jasmine nuzzling towards him when suddenly Jasmine's mother showed up and chomped hard on the back of Joes leg. With ears back she stepped in between the two donkeys and just her menacing look was enough to send Joe and Jasmine to opposite corners of the pasture. She's been keeping a close eye on her daughter ever since. I think I'm going to have to move Joe. Perhaps a season of guarding spring chickens might be a good cure for his spring fever.

Jerry