



Farm News from September

When the phone rings with an unknown number, one never knows what to expect. This time it was a neighbour with some disturbing news. "I just saw one of your cows on the side of the road. Looks like wolves got her. She's still alive." I dropped what I was doing, grabbed a rifle and left.

Last month I'd mentioned that I'd seen a wolf. I was thrilled to see the rare sight since wolves are elusive, rarely seen yet common to the forests and foothills.

When I found the cow it had just died. She was a replacement heifer, worth around \$2000, due to calve for the first time next spring, now food for scavengers. It was a sad loss but I justified it to be like something I needed to pay. Each year I pay federal tax, provincial tax, county tax, this time I paid a nature tax too.

It's a primitive instinct to think of gathering meat as the weather cools down. Requests for sides of beef and pork go up in the fall. As an animal farmer I am comforted every time I drive by my stack of hay bales knowing that my cows and bison will have lots of good food for the winter. Hauling bales home from the fields is a big job. With my faithful pickup truck and my neighbour's gooseneck trailer I made around sixty trips, pulling as much as 23,000 pounds per load, totalling over 400 miles from the fields to home. Next on the list is bringing the bales to the animals but we've got all winter to do that.

My 29 bison yearlings had a good summer grazing at the neighbour's place but the time had come for them to go home. Load them in a trailer or let them walk home? Last year they wandered the 4 miles down the road so this year I thought I'd try the same thing. Unfortunately it didn't work.

They made it the first mile and a half OK but then a neighbour's dog spooked them. When they got to a pipe cattle crossing on the road they were supposed to turn south. Instead they jumped the 10 feet over the pipes and ended up mixed in with hundreds of beef cows who had been peacefully grazing the community pasture. Mayhem ensued with the cows chasing the bison, the bison chasing the cows, the bison splitting into several groups with several groups of cows mixing in, more cattle crossings which the bison jumped and the cows didn't, animals on both sides of the fence no longer sure who was chasing who. The day was quickly being filled with more adventure than I had planned.

Now needing the assistance of my daughter, Mitch the WWOOFer and three quads, we managed to sort the bison out and send them several miles back, almost to the place they started from and capture them in some corrals. This time I used the truck and trailer. Within minutes they were home.

Jerry