



Farm News from April

Sure was an easy winter for feeding cattle. Not only was the weather mild but our new system for feeding bales worked great. While many farmers feed their hay in corrals, we wintered our cattle on pasture but without the use of a tractor. Last summer when we hauled in our hay, we spaced out some of the bales in rows of 10 in a sheltered field, then strung an electric wire around all 10 bales. Winter came and when we started feeding we just moved the wire so they could munch on 10 bales at a time. After they had cleaned up the hay we simply moved the wire and gave them another 10 bales. The nice thing about this system is that the nutrients from the cows and left over hay stay in the field where we want it. Should be good grass growing there for a few years.

Last month I mentioned old "87", the grandmother bison cow I put in with newly weaned bison calves. I thought she would make a good role model for the young ones, showing them how be calm around people and to come when they're called. She hadn't calved in a couple of years but was a nice old cow and I couldn't let her go. It was working great, for awhile, but now my plan has backfired.

The other day when I went to check on them I did my usual call, "Moostoos, Tatonka, Astum!" (Buffalo! Buffalo! Come here!). This time they stayed about as far away as they could be. Strange? Upon closer examination I discovered the reason why. Old "87", the 26 year old grandmother, had just had a calf.

Paul, our new boar escapes! It's not an easy job taking a full sized breeding boar from a conventional hog barn who knows only the confinement of steel panels, put him in the middle of a 30 acre pasture surrounded by a bunch of horny sows and expect him to stay by himself with just an electric wire to keep him under control. Difficult training but necessary. All our pigs are able to live outdoors in rotating pastures because of the portable electric fencing. Move the fence and the pigs have new land to graze. Works great!

In the case of a boar, we have to control when he visits his lady friends so we can even out the number of pigs that are born throughout the year. We also need to select which sows he gets to visit with. There's also the danger of two boars fighting. Their sharp tusks can inflict a lot of damage.

So I'd tell Paul, "one step at a time". "Be patient, it'll take a couple of weeks". First we had him in steel panels, then expanded the panels and introduced one electric wire, then less steel and more wire, then ... At that point Paul must of said "enough!"

When I went out to check on the pigs one morning I noticed some of the fences were wrecked. Wires down, insulators popped off the fibreglass post and scattered everywhere. I immediately thought "moose", they can do that. But no, there was Paul. He had escaped and ended up in the pen of another boar and his harem of sows. Both boars looked OK, no injuries. Paul must have had a few good zaps to achieve his goal. He's respected the fence ever since. Sows and boars are now content. New life has started. 3 months, 3 weeks, 3 days.