



## Farm News from January

Most people do not get to choose their neighbours. We have. Just a 50 second walk from the back door is a group of 33 calves just recently weaned from their mothers. Close to the house, we interact with them throughout the day and they soon learn that us humans pose no threat. The next step is to train them to come when they're called. "Come Boss!" If the boss cow comes, then all the rest will follow. Better they come than be chased.

Last year we were so impressed with our new Belted Galloway bull, he bred every female bovine on the farm. I put out the call for a name and after many suggestions settled on "Randy".

Again the judgement day arrived when the vet came out to "preg test". We had just the one bull and if something had happened (erectile dysfunction, sore back legs, headache) our cows would not be pregnant. The vet had recommended that I bring him in for testing before the breeding season but I hadn't. I was getting really nervous when the first cow the vet tested was "open". Our cows would have been bred out on the grazing lease which is 2000 acres of forest and meadows. The cow and bull would have a lot of searching to do to find each other. I was relieved when the 2<sup>nd</sup> one tested "pregnant" and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>. Out of 44 females tested, 40 were bred. Nice job Randy!

The sows looked so pregnant. The long range forecast looked promising except for one little dip to -28 C. The waiting game

was on. The mild weather kept happening and the sows kept holding back. The weatherman wasn't changing his mind. The freeze would last 3 days. The sows present situation was created 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days ago. I couldn't blame the boar for getting the forecast wrong. The cold weather struck and as feared, that's when the sows gave birth. One of the traits I look for in sows is the instinct to nest and not to lay on the babies. Too cold to peek inside we just waited until the warm weather returned, hoping.



Those sows knew what they were doing. There's lots of healthy new pigs running around. "Northern vigour" they call it.

I thought I was doing the mouse a favour. Trapped in an empty plastic pail, it took one toss and he was free. That's when I realized my mistake. I had been doing the chicken chores. In no time the chickens were after it and soon the mouse was nabbed by the one of the hens who was now trying to outrun the other hens who also wanted a piece of the action. The commotion brought all the other birds out from the hen house. What I thought was a mellow group of egg laying vegetarian hens had turned into a frenzied mob of avian carnivores. In less than a minute the mouse was gone and then the chickens went about as if nothing happened. Now I know their secret. I've heard bacon can cause a similar reaction among other vegetarian species. Jerry