

Farm News from April

As I glance out the dining room window I am greeted by a chicken who is staring back in at me. The hen is roosting on our old couch. Glances exchanged, she makes a little constrictive motion, rises up and has a crap. Normally I would be annoyed but my attitude towards chickens has changed after reading an article on chicken intelligence.

No longer a brainless bird whose only life goal is to become a McNugget, research has now shown that chickens display a wide range of emotions. They are also good at math, being able to do addition and subtraction. Chicks can keep track of numbers up to five within minutes of hatching. Older birds have some



knowledge of structural engineering and are able to select out diagrams that defy laws of physics. The degree of self-

control that takes humans 4 years to learn, chickens have it figured in a few days. Even their clucking and crowing is part of a complex language that can identify individuals and other species by name.

The part that amazes me the most is how my respect for the animal has changed since I became aware of this. Next I'll have to find out what that hen was really trying to say when it stared at me and crapped.

The process of going from a 'cow with milk' to a 'milk cow' is not a simple one.

Clara (named after the sister of one our WWOOFers) is the daughter of the late Buttercup and this month the two year old heifer had her first calf.

Birthing stimulated the udder to start

producing milk and because of

her milk cow genetics she can produce more milk than her calf can consume. The problem is convincing her to share it. At first she was constantly kicking but over time she calmed down and now gives us 4 liters per day plus feeds her growing calf, Sarah.



I've mentioned the mud last fall but this spring it was worse.

Stuck people, stuck trucks, stuck tractors. Pig mud is the worst (because it's not just mud). The horror of not

being able to move, sinking while the mud starts to ooze over the top of your boot is almost as bad as taking the next step and realizing you no longer have a boot. The pigs don't mind and appreciate the fact that someone has taken the time to 'stop' and have a visit.

