



Farm News from December

As the day length decreased with the onset of winter, so did the number of eggs that the chickens laid. Our 40 hens had dropped down from 35 to 5 eggs a day. When the opportunity appeared to increase my chicken flock I went for it. First I added 25 birds that we had hatched out in the spring. Then a neighbour offered me another 12 hens, "we're getting 8 eggs a day" he said. After having almost doubled the chicken population I was anxious to see how many more eggs those hens were laying. There was only one egg! The next 2 days there were none! Now a week later we're getting 2-4 eggs per day. That's not even enough to supply our household let alone the soon to be disappointed customers at the Farmers Market. The thing I really question are those dozen hens that laid the 8 eggs a day. Where did those eggs go? Could a chicken hold back her eggs? Constipated? Maybe I'll put a bit more flax in their feed.

The gestation period for a pig is 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days. We don't keep track of when the sows are bred, we hope the boar remembers. What we do watch for are signs of farrowing, (birthing). The main signs are a big belly, swollen belly line and enlarged nipples. Usually a week before the sow farrows we move her to her own little house, away from the other sows so she can have her own private space, build a nest and do her thing. Sometimes we are taken by surprise and we don't move her soon enough. Then she farrows with the other sows which normally is not a good thing. Although most of the sows are aware of the birthing and tend to give space and privacy to the new mom, some don't really care and when it comes time to go to their shelter to sleep, there is a chance they may lay on the newborns. What happened this month is when we did our daily check of the pig houses, there was a new mother with 4 babies. What to do? Having dealt with this situation many times over

the past 30+ years I knew exactly what needed doing. We had to distract the sow away from her babies (sometimes very difficult but food often works) and then quickly catch the newborns and load them into a plastic sled with some straw from the birthing site. When the sow remembers her motherly responsibilities and returns to her house she finds her babies have moved into a plastic sled. Now she is confused. They are supposed to be in the nest where she left them. She sniffs the straw and noses her babies and then the sled and her babies start to move. Our goal is to get her away from the sow pen and into her private farrowing hut. But the sow thinks her babies are supposed to be back in the hut, not sledding with some humans! I can understand her confusion but it is critical that she follow the sled to the new location. Sometimes she goes running back to her old shelter and we have to bring her back to her babies by making pig squealing noises. She comes running back ready to fight anyone who harms her babies (tense moments). When she starts sniffing the babies we start moving the sled again. It may take a minute or it may take a couple hours but once the mom and her babies arrive at the new farrowing hut we toss the babies into the fluffy straw and leave. It always works. The new family has a new home, the piglets are now safe with their mom and life on the farm continues.

Remember Uganda, the school that needed to move onto their own land? Well this month it happened. After over a year of collecting donations for the Amatsiko School we finally got enough for the school to purchase their own property. Their savings in rent will be enough to cover the cost of moving the school, piece by piece to their new location which is 2.5 km away. Thanks to all those who donated. What a great Christmas present to the kids and staff at Amatsiko School!