



Farm News - July

Shortage of pork. When it comes to breeding sows, most conventional hog operations are pretty high tech. Five days after the piglets are removed from their mothers, the sows go back into heat. Some guy wanders the isle with a bag of pig sperm and artificially inseminates the sows knowing that in exactly 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days, she will farrow again. Ours operation is about as low tech as they come. The sows nurse their babies for many weeks as compared to several days. The time for rebreeding is not as predicable. Also if it looks like the sow needs a rest from pregnancy and mothering, we allow her that break. Add to the equation the boar like our new buddy "Carl". Moodiness, too hot, too cold, too tired are all factors which make predicting pig births a gamble. Well this summer I kind of lost the gamble and as a result, we have no pigs to sell. Not only are the freezers at the Farmers Market low, our faithful customers in Vancouver are having to go porkless. If you're reading this and are among those who are missing their pork chops, so am I.

Great Gray Owl moves into the neighbourhood. The magnificent bird shows little sign of fear and I often see "her" (assumption) perched on the top of the fence posts along the road. If I'm driving and see her I'll stop, roll down the window and watch as she ignores me keeping her big yellow eyes trained to the grass looking for mice. Their wingspan is up to 5 feet!

Life is good if you were a chicken on First Nature Farms. Their 4300 square foot outdoor shelters offered them the freedom to wander, socialize, fluff up the feathers in their dust bath or just laze back on the sunny days. Security is provided by "Joe" the donkey and his girlfriend "Chevelle".

Free range may be a good thing but total freedom has its consequences. That's what happened to Norbert the turkey. One day he escaped from his pen. I thought he would just fly away and never again be seen but a couple of days later he returned to the yard. I could tell he was back since he gobbles at everything. Unfortunately that was Norbert's last day of freedom. Later that night the coyotes got him.

When the time comes to select replacement pigs to become sows, my criteria is quite different than conventional. Aside from body and skin condition, number of nipples, nesting ability, etc., I place a lot of value on character. So when Berkshire 43 (no name yet) was ready to have her first batch of babies I was keeping a close eye on her. One morning when I went to check on her, she was gone. Vanished! No sign anywhere. There was a creek nearby and as the days went by I started thinking the worst. Stuck in the mud, drowning, coyotes, bears! Two weeks later I had totally given up hope. One evening I noticed another sow had escaped. Flopped over on her side I could see she had farrowed and was nursing 7 babies. It was Berkshire #43 (Houdina). Jerry