



Farm News from July

Rain, rain, go away! After years of drought finally we've been getting some good precipitation. The pastures are loving it and any cows or bison out grazing will certainly have all they can eat of the fresh succulent grass. They had better enjoy it now because when fall comes they are in for an unpleasant surprise. All the rain that we (and western Canada) has been receiving has put a damper on haying. When the hay gets cut it takes a two to four warm windy days to dry it out before it can be baled. The swaths rest on top of the cut grass allowing the drying air to circulate around. The trouble is that after two or three days it's been raining, driving the swaths closer to the ground. The damp, wet conditions mean mould can start to grow which is not a good thing. Also the longer we wait to cut the hay, the coarser it gets and then the protein level starts dropping. At this time I should be close to finishing. Instead I am only 5% done.

Whatever condition the hay is in, the cows will either eat it or use it for bedding. At least they'll be going into the winter nice and fat.

The chickens have moved on to the status of chicken dinner. The birds had a good life (while it lasted) spending 75 days on the farm and growing to an average of six pounds. Every year I say "I'm not going to grow chickens again" but when chick season comes around in the spring I say "one more year". Raising chickens on farms used to be a pretty common occurrence. They were a good way to turn some left over grain into a delicious meal. Not any more. When I try and think of how many people I know who raise meat chickens within fifty miles of me, I can think of no one. The farmers still have the grain and still enjoy eating chicken but all of the small plants who would butcher chickens are now gone. When I started my first batch of commercial chickens 18 years ago there were three plants within one and a half hours of the farm that would clean them. Now, thirty seven batches later I have to drive 660 km to find one.

It was evening and I was standing in the kitchen when before my eyes a very bright flash appeared the same time a boom of thunder ripped through the silence. "Wow! That was close!" I didn't realize how close until half an hour later I went walking down the driveway and saw a huge poplar tree, about a couple hundred feet from the house had been struck. The electricity exploded all the bark off for a good twenty feet and burst the wood sending pieces flying a good sixty feet. Just 20 feet from the tree is where we milk Buttercup each morning. Both Buttercup and Daisy were standing about as far away as their pasture would let them. The blast shut down our internet for almost a week.

Not as serious as it could be. One neighbour told me his father's cows were touching the fence when lightning struck, killing thirty cows.

When I fumbled the box of Shreddies and ended up with the breakfast cereal on the floor I thought of Jack my dog. He eats pretty much anything and loves treats so I swept them up, opened the door and dropped them into his bowl. The sound of food hitting his dog dish immediately brought the slumbering giant to check out what new treat might have appeared. After few sniffs he looked up from his bowl with a look that said "what are you trying to feed me?" I thought he must not be hungry so I went in to start my breakfast again. Later when I went out to begin my morning animal chores I noticed the Shreddies were still untouched. Curious, I poured some dog food into another dish which the dog gobbled down. Hmm? Maybe Jack knows something I don't? Maybe "Kennel Blend" is a superior product? I'll leave that thought untested.

First Nature Farms is a family farm in the Peace Country. Once a month, First Nature Farms owner Jerry Kitt writes about his experiences on the farm



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