



Farm News - May

Rescue chickens. Springtime is chicken time on the farm and I can't say I look forward to chicken season. They are a lot of work and not very profitable. Each time when I think I'm going to quit the chicken business I ask myself "where would I buy my chicken from?" which is the same question the folks who buy my chickens would ask. Since I have no answer I am raising chickens again.

I like to raise my broilers when the outdoor pastures are lush and green, encouraging the birds to dine on salad rather than only grains. The normal process for raising chickens starts with ordering the birds. It takes 21 days for a chicken egg to hatch (28 for turkeys) so the hatchery needs a minimum of 3 weeks notice in order to "set" and hatch the eggs. Usually 80 or 90% of the eggs hatch when they are supposed to so when the big chicken barns order a 100,000, the hatchery must start with more than 100,000 eggs. Of course the hatchery will want to fill the order but due to quota regulations, they cannot exceed the order. Ever wonder what happens to the extra chicks? You wouldn't want to know.

That's where we come in. Rather than ordering the birds in advance, I wait until the hatchery has a "long" hatch (too many birds). The surplus chicks which normally would have a premature appointment to "meet their maker" can now look forward to a full life on our farm (twice as long as "normal"). My mobile outdoor pens are 4300 sq feet so rather than life in a barn, they can enjoy the sunshine and walk on the real earth.

Beavers! We have no shortage of the buck-toothed rodents on our farm. Most evenings you can hear the sounds of tails slapping or trees falling. Now they've moved in just downstream of our house and with their new dam are turning our quiet, little creek into a lake. Nothing a bit of dynamite can't fix.

Willy our new boar is having problems. He may not realize he has a problem and although it may be not problem for him, it is a problem for me. He's matured into a nice guy: friendly, good character, muscular with good genetics. His only undesirable quality is his lack of libido. This does not seem to bother him but the sows are a little frustrated. So am I. No breeding = no piglets = no pork = no income! I had to get another boar and start all over again. I hope that "Johnson" has what it takes.

Most of the farm animals are able to reproduce at any time of the year, something like humans. The bison are a little fussy. August is breeding season and nine months later in the month of May, the new calves arrive. It's nice to see the light brown babies speckling the spring pasture.

Joe the donkey is a pretty nice guy. Lead him, ride him or trim his feet, he's OK with it all. His lady friends on the other hand are quite different. They were not handled in the past and would like nothing to do humans. Too bad their hooves keep growing. The previous owner put them through a hydraulic squeeze to trim the feet. Not really liking the idea, I decided to resort to the cowboy method. Having tried this myself and have a donkey hoof flash out and stop just a couple millimetres from my teeth, I was not going to be that cowboy but Carlo our neighbour was. Not only did he trim the feet he also "tuned them up" so that now the two unruly females are a little more approachable and will eat from my hand. Hats off to the cowboys.

1077 times I have to squeeze the teat to get a gallon of milk. I'm getting better. Jerry