

Farm News from September

Hunting season has arrived and our normally quiet road is seeing lots of new traffic. Usually two guys in a pickup truck. It's easy to tell the hunters from the locals, they don't tend to wave. All of our land is posted "No Hunting", not that I mind hunters but I like to offer the wildlife a place where they can take refuge and feel safe. Since 1980 the farm goal has been "to protect and to enhance our natural biodiversity".

I unexpectedly did some "hunting" of my own the other day on my way to town. As I was driving down the gravel road I noticed a group of grouse on the side of the road. As I passed one of them flew up, hit the side of my pickup and then tumbled into the box dead. Hunting can't get much easier than that! I thought of the WWOOFers back at home and how they might enjoy some fresh grouse for supper!

I kept driving and eventually forgot about the grouse in the back of my truck until later, at highway speeds, the wind caught the bird and sent it flying from my truck box onto the road. The traffic behind me changed my menu plans for the evening. We had pork roast instead.

Sad to see Daisy go. Daisy was our heifer calf born last year to Buttercup our milk cow. She was due to have her own calf soon and once that happened she could start being milked. The thought of having two milk cows was a little overwhelming. Even with one cow we sometimes get backed up in our milk supply and the fridge has had to store up to five of the glass gallon jars. At that point the pigs get lucky.

Some cows can be so wild that they'll take off when you get within half a mile of them. Other cows can be so tame that you can rest your head against them while you squeeze their teats for half an hour. The difference is the amount of time you spend training them. We spent a lot of time with Daisy, halter training her, brushing her and leading her around the pasture.

The new owners just called me yesterday. Daisy just had a little bull calf.

Not too many motorists get to idle down the road with a herd of bison in front of them. Three months back I trucked my thirty bison yearlings in a trailer to a neighbour's pasture four miles away. Ever since then I wondered "how am I going to get them back?" You need a pretty elaborate set of corrals to load them into a trailer so I decided to open up the gate, let them loose, and head them in the direction of home. They were doing fine just slowly munching their way home until a vehicle from the opposite direction came, saw the herd and thought they would try and stop them. My arm waving didn't help. He ended up backing into a driveway where I had just set up a fence, caught the fence with his bumper and took the fence down. The bison were confused and took off into an adjacent field. After the truck (and the next one after that) had left I got them back onto the road where they continued munching their way back home. Compared to being hauled in a trailer, I think they quite enjoyed their trip back home. I know I did.

Three months, three weeks, and three days ago "Old Faithful" our old boar must have had the time of his life. Now I have baby pigs like I've never had before. Cute beyond words, the hundred and fifty plus little piglets are just starting to leave the safety of their homes to start exploring their new world. Once they get brave they will go through their delinquent stage where they will venture under the fences into places they shouldn't be like the turkey pens and feed boxes. Once they're weaned I'll teach them about electric fencing. In the spring after I've spent forty to fifty thousand dollars feeding them I should have no shortage of pork. My concern is "what if I have a surplus?"

Something has spooked my cows. Cougar? Grizzly? Wolves? Hunters? Normally they all stay together in a herd grazing away the summer months on the 2000 acres lease. Now they are scattered all over the country. I found one group sixteen kilometres from home. It is not an easy job herding cows through the forest so I'm hoping that in my next "Farm News" I can write "Cows come home!" Till then,