



## Farm News from June

What a difference a bit of rain can make! What started out as a drought quickly changed when over a 3 day period, 5 inches of rain quenched the cracking spring earth. The plants responded with silent shouts of "Go for it!" sprouting new seeds and lush leaves. The diversity of the forests and fields were waiting for this rain. With most species on hold, we were eventually rewarded with song birds with content bellies, dust free air and mosquitos. The creeks which had become standing puddles started flowing (and flooding in some areas). This rain was what was needed and certainly changed the outlook for the summer. I think I might go haying.

Boys and their toys. Some farm expenses just can't wait and I've been putting one off for years. At least once a week I had to hook up to the old stock trailer (brand new when I bought it). Every animal that we ever raised had taken a trip in that trailer. Some arriving to the farm, most leaving the farm. Age had taken its toll with the trailer, doors that required pry bars to open or close, rust that had turned to see through holes, the wooden floor which smelled permanently like "farm". The final straw was when the trailer caused my truck wires to melt. I love my new trailer.

When you talk about balls on pigs one would normally be referring to testicles on boars. That's not always the case with free ranging pigs who enjoy wallowing in the mud. Fine tuning the consistency of the mud is vital for creating the ideal wallow. As the wallows dry, the mud becomes thick. When the pig tries rolling in the mud, rather than washing off, the mud sticks to the pig, especially to the long hairs at the bottom of the tail. There it dries until the pig decides to have another mud bath and eventually the mud on the tail gets larger and larger and eventually develops into a large ball. I've seen some the size of a large melon.

Getting these mud balls off is no simple matter. If you try to pull them off, it hurts and the pig very quickly learns not to let humans approach from behind. I've heard of one farmer who justified this problem as an excuse to cut off the tails of the pigs (called "docking" and happens to all commercial pigs). Our solution involves a bit more work. Every morning at feeding time, while the pig is distracted, we sneak up behind with a bottle of water and pour it onto the base of the tail. Eventually the mud softens and the mud ball falls off much to the relief of the afflicted animal. When it comes to jobs on the farm, expect the unexpected.