

Farm News from February



A new record! You'll never read about it in the Guinness Book but it was an amazing achievement on this farm.



Straw is the one ingredient in a pig's existence that rockets their "quality of life". They love it! I've said it hundreds of times to the many people who have helped out

on the farm, "the nicest thing you can do for a pig is to give them straw".

Straw is super light when fluffy but can weigh 1300 pounds when compressed into a round bale. Because it is so fluffy there's a bit a skill involved to stab a lot of it with your pitch fork and carry it into the pig house. If you can only fork a pound of fluffy straw at a time, you'll have to repeat the process 1300 times. To make matters

more difficult, they all want the straw and when they're rubbing and rolling in it, then the bale starts falling apart



and buries them in the straw (like heaven for a pig!). Sometimes they'll even take the straw right off your pitch fork. If that's not enough of a challenge, try forking straw with 70 excited

pigs! Two or three bales in an afternoon can be a work-out. The new record? Eight!

Wheat, peas, oats and flax. Ground together with a few essential minerals and vitamins added and you have pig food so good you can make pancakes from it. We have! All organic too. (admittedly a bit gritty because of the limestone).

This month we're trying a new ingredient - turmeric.

Their gut bacteria are supposed to love it. We'll see. Hopefully the pork doesn't taste like curry." Hey? But I like curry!"



As predicted, there are now lots of new piglets running around. In a couple of



months there will be people looking for baby pigs and it seems there are

fewer farmers each year selling them. It's certainly not a money maker, but it helps us determine which of the new gilts would make the best sows. "Mothering instinct" is one of the traits we look for when selecting new sows. It's disappearing quickly in commercial operations. Also nice is to have families come over, excited for their new pigs (and the new chores that go with them).

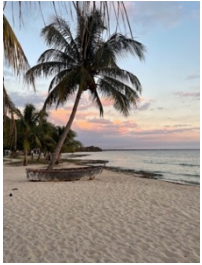


Jerry

There's more! ["Farm News from Cuba"](#) follows...



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This was my seventh time to the island and it is important to know that it is not the beaches or hotels that call me back. Being unable to swim and having almost drowned

three times, the beaches are only the perimeter of the island; when I turn my head and look away from the blue waters and white sands, that's when I see the real Cuba.

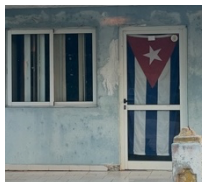
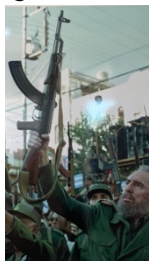
It's no ordinary history that has made the country what it is today.



A Spanish colony for centuries, the country was stripped of the forests and turned into an

island factory for sugar production. Cuba had to fight for their independence and then later, fight to free themselves from the American control that was taking over the

island. The victory of these battles left a sense of independence, pride and patriotism that is still evident today.



The "Bay of Pigs" is where the Cubans beat the US in battle in 1961. The embarrassment must still be sore because the US have

been seeking revenge ever since.

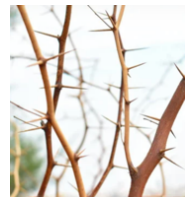
When sugar cane was king, there was a lot of money coming into the island and food was



mostly imported. That all changed when trade ended unexpectedly, leaving a country that had to learn to feed itself. That is one of the lessons I came to learn. When global trade runs out and communities are left to fend for themselves, how do they (we) do it?

This oversimplified history brings me to the present. I was part of a group organized by Ron Berezan (The Urban Farmer) who has travelled to Cuba 43 times. We visited 20 farms both urban and rural. What they shared in common was the production of food: fruits, vegetables and sometimes meat using no synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, relying mainly on soil, water and sunlight.

Amazingly, many of these were previously garbage dumps or sometimes covered by Marabou, an invasive species that can grow to 25 feet with piecing, three-inch thorns.



Armed with machetes and hoes, the amount of effort needed to transform these abandoned lands into food production is beyond imagination; yet we passed by hundreds of such farms.



Of the 20 we visited, I saw no rototillers or tractors as we would need here in Canada. From the clearing of land, construction of raised beds,

seeding,

transplanting, weeding, to the final harvests, it was all done by hand. Manual labour is not necessarily a job for the uneducated.



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. We acknowledge the homeland of the many diverse First Nations and Metis people whose ancestors have walked this land since time immemorial. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Treaty 8.

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Quite the opposite. Many of the farmers we spoke to had university degrees. As a matter of fact, the literacy rate in Cuba is over 98%. Food producers often make more money than the professionals.

The results of their labour certainly kept us well nourished.



This is not true for everyone, sadly. With the fuel embargo that the USA has recently imposed, life is changing - drastically! Most electricity for the island comes from giant generating stations, fueled by diesel. With the fuel supply cut off, so is the electricity. Sometimes the power is off for 22 hours a day and can



come on anytime, usually in the middle of the night. For farmers, this is the time to get out of bed, start the irrigation pump, move hoses, charge the batteries, do the repairs, cook the food, etc. and then go back to bed when the lights go off, hopefully with enough sleep to start working again in the morning.

Cooking without a stove? Many places have had to switch from electric stoves to burning charcoal.



Trade has been cut off and now countries which supplied fuel in the past are now threatened by tariffs. Consequences?



Severe! Public transportation! Commuting to work! Schools closing! Surgeries cancelled! Crops dying! No food moving to the cities! Hunger! Unemployment! etc. etc. Such wonderful people; they don't

deserve this!

There is a brighter side, mostly thanks to the Chinese. Solar farms have sprung up in the countryside, now supplying 30% of the country's energy needs. Those that can afford it have put up panels. Electric utility vehicles and scooters are becoming more common. Those that can't afford solar are in trouble.



We caught the last flight out of Cuba. Our group had been treated so well and were so moved by the people we met. We left when the problems were just beginning. I felt like I was turning my back on a friend. The trip had left us humbled, inspired, and motivated. We could do more and we will. [Join us?](#) Jerry