

March 24th, 2012 - Summer in Winter/Spring Update

While the weather may say it is summer, the time of the year indicates otherwise. We've been spending all our time trying to get ready for the upcoming season.



Our layers are out on pasture in their mobile chicken coop. It took them several weeks to truly appreciate the nuances of their new home, but they've grown to love it. They run out the door in the morning ready to eat worms, stay out as long as they possibly can, and then crowd back into the coop in the evening for shelter and protection. I challenge anyone that says that a chicken can't be trained! The coop itself rolls well and is structurally solid. The only difficulty we've had with it is the inability to move it backwards. Due to the steering

running gear, it makes going in reverse nearly impossible. We are adjusting our positioning appropriately and it shouldn't be a problem.

We have many of the spring time veggies planted in the gardens and they seem to be coming on very well. Normally at this time of year we would be using our "low tunnels" and plastic to shelter the veggies in the evenings, but the weather has been so warm that this has been unnecessary. There are several new tools that we've been using in the garden and we are really fond of all of them. The first is a broadfork that was made by our friend Matt Rogers.

Matt is the owner and founder of [Clean Air Yurts](#) and he really made a quality product. Using the broadfork has taken some of the load off our tiller and allowed us to get an earlier start in some beds that would otherwise be too moist to work. If you're interested, email Matt for a quote on getting a broadfork to you. The second tool we've been using quite a bit is the wheel hoe from [Valley Oak Tools](#). We got a 5" and 8" hoe, a cultivator, and a furrower. The 8" hoe has been great for taking up sod and edging our beds, while the 5" is better for getting between rows and precision weeding. The cultivator excels at breaking up the hard crust that can form on a fallow bed and is a nice low impact way of getting a bed ready for planting. For seeding we purchased a [Jang Seeder from Woodward Crossing](#). This was the most difficult purchase to make because of the very high cost of the machine. The Jang seeder has the ability to singulate seeds of a very small size and lay them down in any pattern that you desire. As a result, for the first time we have perfectly straight, evenly spaced rows of lettuce, spinach, radishes, kale, chard, beets, and arugula. Amazing! The machine also allows you to save an amazing amount of seed. We'll try and get some pictures of the garden on the web soon.

The high tunnel is complete. It was no easy feat, but the structure is in place and the irrigation is functional. Today we transplanted tomatoes into it - approximately 200 of them. The roof top water collection seems to be functioning well. Not



counting the storms we are getting this afternoon, each tank was at a little less than half capacity with 600 gallons in them. Cucumbers, peppers, and eggplants are still in our germinating house, but will soon be ready for the tunnel as well. In the next week we'll be installing drip irrigation in our other gardens.

We got involved with the Lewisburg Farmers Market on a management level two months ago. Lauren is the Secretary and Paul is the President. Since we've taken office we've secured a lease for the LFM with the City of Lewisburg so that we can use the United Methodist Church parking lot for our Saturday market. Securing this lease has taken a fair bit of time, and it seemed that every couple days we were going to another meeting with either the LFM or city to make this deal happen. It happened, and the start of the market should be the 3rd week of April.

Our first batch of broilers arrives April 1st; this marks the start of our "busy season." Until then we'll just be taking it easy - right.

January 29th, 2012 - Goat Kids

There are 3 does that have already kidded, with 4 more on the way. Everyone is looking good and the weather has held up well, so everything has gone smoothly. Pictures will be coming in the future. If you're interested in purchasing a goat, now is the time to come and see them to reserve yours!

January 22, 2012 - Part B (Farm)

Since we've returned from our extended vacation, we've been busily working to get all of the "little stuff" done so that we can seamlessly produce during the warmer months.

We've got supplies to build two more broiler pens, which means we should have 120 more broilers available at each processing date during the spring and summer. There are 4 dates scheduled, with the possibility of a fifth depending on our motivation and the weather. To accommodate these additional birds we've been working on streamlining our processing ability. We've designed and constructed aluminum killing cones, and the vision is to mount these on a rotating circular frame - a killing carousel if you will. Also we are refurbishing our plucker with a more robust motor; there were issues with it getting bogged down in the past year.



On January 19th we received our replacement layers - Golden Comets. They came on a cold day and we were concerned that they might not make it, but so far all 100 have been energetic and content.

Their new home is about 60% complete - a mobile chicken coop fit for a royal family. The design is our own and we think it's going to work very well. Coop mobility will allow us to give the layer the best pasture, thus increasing insect and green matter consumption and hopefully yielding even better eggs than we had before!

Progress on our high tunnel is slow because of the warmer than normal weather. We would prefer to have the ground frozen so that we can work in the tunnel without having to fight the mud, but with such a mild winter we may have to deal. The white oak framing material is next to the tunnel and we have the baseboards installed. Next is installing hip boards and framing the end walls, which we need to do sooner rather than later if we want this tunnel operational for spring greens.

The goats are going to kid soon, though it appears that only half are bred - this in short, sucks. We'll deal, but we expect half or fewer kids this year than we had last year.

January 22, 2012 - Part A (Vacation)

The end of November and month of December were very relaxing for us. For Thanksgiving we went to Travelers Rest, SC to visit with Paul's parents and spend time with family. The meals were fantastic and the entertainment was great as well. One highlight was seeing a Cirque du Soleil show in Greenville; their acrobatics are incredible.



We then drove with Paul's mother to Florida and spent a week in Florida visiting with Grandparents and soaking up the warmth and sun. When you have three people to drive with, the time and miles go by quickly, and the trip was a real pleasure. We even got to go scuba diving!

After returning to SC in early December, we continued our extended trip and drove to an area just north of Monterrey, MX in 2 days. We were able to use Houston, TX as a stopping point, which allowed us to visit with Paul's brother and wife. Crossing into Mexico was a breeze and before we knew it we were in El Potrero Chico, just outside the northern town of Hidalgo. We had been to El Potrero several times in the past; the area is known for its excellent rock climbing on steep limestone fins that can go quite tall (up to 2500'). There were substantially fewer climbers there than in prior years, likely because of the well publicized dangers from cartel violence. Even so, we were able to meet up with old friends and make new ones. The climbing was great; though the weather was a bit cooler than normal.



We stayed in the Potero for 2 weeks, then we went to a subdestination for climbing located about 3 hours from El Potrero called El Salto. This was our first time to El Salto, and it blew our minds. The climbing is fantastic and underdeveloped (though difficult) and the local environment is comfortable and very Mexican. When you're in El Salto, you're with family. Regretfully we left after a week, only stopping to collect our things in Hidalgo before making the long drive back to WV. The drive time is about 30 hours back home from Mexico, and we arrived on December 30th with renewed vigor and lots of great ideas - and memories.



November 15, 2011 - Stewing Hens for Sale

Yesterday we harvested our entire laying flock, with the exception of seven hens that escaped the butcher and found a new home with our friends the Diehls - home of [Lockbridge Pottery](#). Our motivation behind this harvest was multifaceted. First, we are planning on building a mobile chicken coop this winter so that we can move the layers around our fields to provide a better diet for the hens and fertilizers for the pastures. Since our previous layers were accustomed to a stationary coop and the freedom to roam wherever they desired, we felt that starting with a fresh flock in the mobile coop would be best. Secondly, we are planning on taking the month of December off and not having any chickens to care for makes it easier for someone to farm-sit.

All the hens and rooters were processed yesterday and are in our freezer waiting for YOU to buy them. **The chickens weigh between 2.5 lbs and 4 lbs and are being sold for \$2.00/lb frozen.** For clarification, these chickens are very different than the broilers we raise. They are significantly older than the broilers (2-3 years) and have a totally different texture and taste. Since they are laying hens they are leaner and have less meat, but what they lack in meat is made up in copious amounts of bright yellow fat on the chicken. These chickens will make excellent stock or stew; the key to success is cooking them long and slow so that the meat is tender and falls off the bone. [Contact us](#) if you are interesting in purchasing some stewing hens.

October 12, 2011

It is official; we are done with broilers for the 2011 year. Our last two processing days were October 9th and 10th and they were a great success. On Sunday the Ehlermans and Lacy helped us to process nearly 150 chickens in less than 7 hours, averaging over 20 chickens an hour. That was important because we sold EVERY chicken we processed. On Monday Lauren and I worked alone on 150 more chickens, though we did have some impromptu help from the Boumans, Sarah, and Guy. Again, we sold every chicken we could without cutting into what we needed for the restaurant delivery on Tuesday. It seems that the chicken word is getting out and we are happy that everyone is as excited about good poultry as we are.

The trip to the northeast for Lauren's cousin's wedding was nice, though Paul got sick with flu like symptoms almost immediately after leaving the farm and only recovered after returning to West Virginia. We were able to see a long time friend of ours in NY. He is building yurts and some custom furniture - see [here](#) for his website. The Boumans were generous enough to move the chickens in our place and assure that our customers ultimately received a quality product.

Today we finished pounding in the ground posts for our 26' x 56' high tunnel. It was a very physical job because it required a 6' long 2" diameter steel posts to be driven into the ground 3' using a sledge. Every post required about 50 blows and throwing around a 12 lb sledge like that is exhausting, especially for 26 posts. This seems to be the most physical part of the job; the assembling from here seems more tedious but less strenuous.



Our garden is doing okay now that cooler temperatures and rain have come back into the mix. We have delicious radishes, vibrant chard, and big leaves of curly kale. Also, the arugula appears to have reseeded itself and we discovered huge leaves of the stuff growing rampant. We still have many rows of potatoes to dig, though it has been a frustrating process because there has been a vole devouring or damaging a large portion of our harvest. The garlic needs to be planted soon, so we'll be preparing beds for that as soon as the weather allows.

We expect two goats to give birth to kids this fall , with at least one birthing coming in the next week or two. All of our other does have been exposed to our buck and should kid sometime in early February.

We expect to have a slightly more mellow winter than the two previous. There are some projects that we'd like to complete such as the high tunnel and 1 or 2 mobile chicken coops for our layers. There is a possibility that we will process our current layers so that we can start fresh in the spring with a new egg laying system, a new coop, and new layers. As much as we would like to go to the Bahamas and snorkel, it likely won't happen, though there is a possibility for some down time in January. Like everything else, we'll see.