

# SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS  
CHICKEN & LAMB

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## Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

June 29, 2013

The farm continues to develop and grow at a steady pace. There's always too much work to be done but it's enjoyable work with which we take great care. Lately it has started to feel that we have created a lot of solid, interconnected systems for managing the farm that are now firmly in place. The number of weekly surprises we encounter has diminished measurably. Thankfully.

It's hard to describe the amount of care we take with each animal and all of the other elements that make up our farm. Recently we attended a meeting for the Schuyler County Cornell Cooperative Extension 'Agriculture Program Committee'. Both Walter and I are volunteers for this program. A member of the group was joking about how every farm these days has "happy hens, happy cows, happy this and happy that". We laughed as that is certainly the feeling one gets when reading small farm websites, blogs and brochures.

The truth of the matter is that our existence on the land with the animals is much more complex than just making sure that all the animals are 'happy'. By raising animals to produce eggs and meat we are involved in myriad relationships that evoke serious consideration and feelings from us while we strive to provide the best care for all the animals on a regular basis.

Picture going out to the field day after day, season after season, looking after the sheep and lambs. We observe their personalities, physical attributes and relationships with one another. Additionally, we trim their hooves, vaccinate them, feed them and occasionally provide urgent care. This gives us a lot of contact with the sheep. We see them. And they see us. Many of the sheep wander over to be scratched and to socialize with the humans. All the while we know that the lambs, mainly the ram lambs, will one day provide good, clean food for people.

Frequently we have visitors to the farm who are excited to see the animals but when it comes time for dinner they cannot quite fathom eating a lamb burger. The preference is to eat meat from the supermarket. Emotionally it seems easier that way. But I wonder if it really is easier? When we buy a piece of meat from the grocery there is no telling how that animal was raised. Did it come from a feedlot or was it treated in a less than kind manner by the people who managed it? Was it given 'medicated' feed and/or corn most of its life that actually made it sick, being slaughtered just before it died anyway? It's hard to say but these days we know a lot about the mass production of meat. It's in the news regularly and it's not good news.

This brings us back to the little lamb out in our field. A friend recently said he never eats mammals. I found this curious and asked why? He said, as a mammal himself, he relates better to a lamb than a chicken; therefore we should save the mammals. After having been around birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals I've come to the conclusion that I am in no

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position to decide which group is more deserving than another to not be eaten. But I do know that they all deserve to live the best life possible while they are here. Flinging open the gates tomorrow and letting everyone run free wouldn't really solve the matter as farm animals have been bred for hundreds of years in relationships with people where they are dependent on us and vice versa. Our sheep might not last an entire night out in the woods due to the coyotes.

Coyotes and dogs roam the hills that surround Seneca Lake. They attack whatever prey they see fit for dinner. Sheep are relatively defenseless and are highly dependent on their shepherd to protect them. Without sturdy fences and livestock guardian dogs the flock would not survive.

For me, farming brings up these thoughts on a daily basis. Farming is the cycle of life or, perhaps more accurately, life and death. Every day plants, fungi and animals are being born, living and dying. It's within this context that I have come to terms with eating our lambs, pulling a mushroom off of a log to fry up in a pan, eating the eggs of the chicken, duck or goose and taking the chickens to the butcher.

We know that we are not the original farmers and our animals are not the first farm animals. The relationships that exist on our farm are a direct result of thousands of years of people, plants, fungi and animals coexisting and coevolving. The life of a farmer is a life filled with duality. We carefully and thoughtfully raise animals, frequently expressing love and admiration for them, knowing the details of their daily lives. Then, we carefully and deliberately end their lives to provide high-quality food for people who appreciate and enjoy it.

Although this subject is complex, we are able to make sense of it on a variety of levels. We are stewards and witnesses to life on this piece of land. The longer we are here the more committed we are to learning about this place. It is a deeply moving experience that draws us in day by day. Our hope is that our friends who come to visit the farm will return many times, visiting the animals, asking questions and thinking about where their food comes from and how it is raised.



*White Layer Ducks on pasture*



*Franklin Delano Roosevelt*



*Piglets at play*