

# SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS  
CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com

## Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

September 14, 2013

Fall is a time of seemingly quick change – it catches us by surprise not because it appears so quickly but the changing weather makes farmers confront the dwindling growing season.

By now we have started raising our last batch of broiler chickens and pekin ducks for 2013. The new laying hens are a good size and have started laying a few eggs each day though not all of them have begun to produce. The Cayuga ducks are molting, which gives them a much needed break from laying eggs on an almost daily basis, hard work for a body. The new white layers have also started laying small pullet eggs, which will get larger as the birds mature.



*Pekin ducks lined up along a trench of fresh water on the pasture*



*Walter communing with the pumpkins*

The sheep are in good form, moving along through the pastures. It's our job to make sure they have enough winter insulation in the form of fat, that their feet are in good shape and that the forage and hay available are plenty sufficient to keep them comfortable through the winter.

Our current work activities include ordering and putting up 26 tons of organic hay. Although this sounds like a pretty easy task it has taken months of research to find a good hay supplier, organic or otherwise, that is located not too far from our farm. Finding a good hay farmer is like finding the proverbial needle in the haystack – it can be downright frustrating.

Many hay farmers don't test the quality of their forage even though the testing is affordable and it takes only a few days to receive the results. The weather in the northeast offers a challenging hay situation – as a Cornell professor who specializes in sheep nutrition wrote to me recently in an email, 'Hay is very difficult to make in the East because if there is enough rain to grow the forage then there is too much rain to dry it out after cutting to make good hay.'

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Oh, darn! I was getting that impression...and when I ask hay farmers what the crude protein value is of their hay they say it's something like 14%...then I ask if they have tested it and they say they have not done that in years. We end up having it tested for them and then send them the results, which usually show the crude protein to be about 6%. We have it tested because we cannot afford to buy 20 + tons of mediocre hay. Sheep cannot survive on 6% crude protein when the temperature is 10 degrees Fahrenheit, there's freezing rain, deep snow and a howling wind. They just can't. Hence my two year search for a suitable source.

It seems we have finally found a farm that is diligent about how they are managing their hay fields, they just happen to be certified organic and they were lucky enough to get a good level of precipitation through this growing season plus a number of sunny, dry days allowing them to bale the hay after it had dried sufficiently. Wet hay molds quickly and becomes useless or, even worse, toxic and sometimes deadly to livestock, therefore proper drying is essential.

In nine days the tractor trailer will arrive with the hay and a local fellow with the proper equipment will show up to unload the 500 lb square bales and stack them in the barn. It will be a tiring day keeping everything organized and moving along but we will feel relieved to have the hay on hand and secured in a dry pole barn for winter storage.

While there are stresses and strains on the farm many days there are also plenty of things to enjoy, marvel at and be thankful for such as the two puppies who are developing into really nice livestock guardian dogs, an array of beautiful insects, amphibians and reptiles that appear briefly, letting us know they are still out there, the recent hot air balloon that landed in our woods then took off again, the ever joyful pigs and the lone gosling who thinks she's a duck!



*The Boy!*



*Our friendly snapping turtle*



*Large frog in the driveway*

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*Balloon landing in the back 40*



*Our first giant pumpkin*



*Gosling with an identity crisis*



*Walking stick insect*



*Parasol mushroom*



*Moth masquerading as a leaf*



*Porcine heaven with Spots-A-Lot, the friendly pig, in the feed bowl*