

Lessons Re Enforced

The leaves are just now changing or gone and for the first time since I can remember this summer actually felt full and maybe even long. It may be because the spring started out so poorly with only 6 weaned piglets as opposed to the projected 40. The scramble to find butchers for the now disproven sows and make up for a hit in early season cash flow from piglets made for longer days. I had to have a few uncomfortable conversations with people I had committed to providing piglets to, I hadn't taken money which kept it a simple apology but I did feel bad to put them in the same position I was now in, looking for reasonably priced and quality piglets in the spring at the most expensive time of the year for shoats. **Lesson 1 reinforced: don't count your chickens before they hatch, or piglets before they wean for that matter.**



A healthy later summer litter of piglets, sniffing stumps and their sibling's rumps.

Moving cattle to fresh grass is second only to wrestling with my kids. It's my version of yoga, golf, exercise, gambling, drinking, and vocation all in one activity. However, chasing grass and dispersing manure with a fluctuating herd size at four different properties—which means loading the herd on trailers each time—created lots of opportunities for long days. Having a catch pen, with trailer access, at the end of their rotation around the farm was crucial. Even if that catch pen was made of free cattle panels so bent they looked more like a McDonalds symbol than a

rectangle and even if it was held together by bailing twine and prayer. But having willing and able bodied friends to help load after the sun begins to set and after attempting to do it myself long enough to get the cattle a little suspicious was crucial. **Lesson 2 reinforced when someone offers you a hand, take it.**



Our beef herd grazing the prettiest corner of our New Ipswich lease during the prettiest season.

Having so many stretches of dry weather also made the summer feel long. Leaving the windows open and the strollers outside without consequence was nice but for produce and livestock growers alike, this year's drought was no joke. Pasture regrowth was minimal, second cutting of hay is almost non-existent causing a shortage in supply and an increase in price. Furthermore, the well at one of our lease farms went dry and that required lots of trips with a dented IBC tote filled with water in the back of the truck. **Lesson 3 reinforced: Two is one one is none.** Backup pumps, and water sources are crucial.



All the solar energy in the world can't pump water out of a dry well.

Last month Melissa's cousin casually mentioned they wanted to expand their sheep flock but didn't have the pasture. We had a few acres of silvopasture the cows, pigs and chainsaws developed over the last couple years sitting idle. There was plenty of fodder (leaves on shrubs and trees) and we already grazed the cattle there earlier in the year. We also welcomed the additional fertility and maintenance the sheep and goat would provide. Their two goats and two sheep turned into 12 sheep and 5 goats real quick and we couldn't be happier. Sam has gone above and beyond clearing fence lines and expanding into other overgrown areas. The kids love occasionally seeing their cousins at chore time and have learned to communicate quite loudly

with the “baa-baas”. **Lesson 4 Reinforced: Remember where you came from.** We know all too well what it’s like to be a farmer without a farm, we are pumped to let them piggy back on our lease.



The sheep enjoying some hay after a day of climbing and cleaning shrubs and brush.

Turkey troubles have really made me wince. Last year we loved the turkeys, their aggressive foraging and undeniable contribution to grass fertility was something I dreamed about all year. The exciting season finale of handing out large plump birds was a blast. The excitement everyone had to see their family and friends in the coming days combined with the jitters of it being way too cold that early in the year especially to talk as long as I probably did about turkeys in our dark driveway...yeah it was a blast. Not to mention they tasted great. Well, I say all that to tell you how we unfortunately won’t have turkeys for sale this year. To make a long story short I let a simple problem go on too long that could have been solved if I reached out and asked for help a little sooner. **Lesson 5 reinforce: "A prudent question is one-half of wisdom"** -Francis Bacon (yes I chose the quote based on his last name)



The four remaining turkeys enjoy fresh pasture.

Finally, chores seemed to take longer every day because well, they did. Last summer I usually had just Eleanor and a lot of rainy days so the ten minutes of “must happen every day, need to do them no matter what” feed, fence and water checks were limited to just that if she wasn't in the mood to explore and pick wild “toe-a-toes” or get wet from the rain. This year with two toddlers and dry afternoons my ten minutes of checks would consistently turn into an hour of picking black berries, removing thorns stuck to diapers, sand from princess slippers, stopping clumsy sword fights with our lightweight portable fence posts, and working on plant identification. Culminating with a happy tickle fight on the fourwheeler seat as we finally sped home for dinner. **Lesson reinforced 5: “Childhood is a short season.” -Helen Hayes.** **Lesson 6 reinforced: No matter how much she loves them, sometimes mom needs an hour break! -Gus**



George, showing little remorse for eating his share and then some of the wild blackberries at chore time.

So yeah, it was a long summer where we lost a ton of piglets and turkeys. Struggled with infrastructure and escapes on 4 different properties. Ran wells dry and paid more for hay. But honestly, I picked a bunch of berries with the kids, was able to chase the farming dream another year, and learned a hell of a lot. It honestly was a lot of fun. Here's to a good summer, good customers, and another season of knowledge to apply to our vision of a truly regenerative and wholesome farm.