



## Winter 2009

From the Desk of Kevin Doll

Hello to all from the farm. Hope this letter finds you healthy and happy!

All of us at Back Forty Acres would like to thank you folks for your support in 2008. We met many new people and made many new friends along the way. We would certainly like to hear from you on what you thought about your purchase experience, from your initial contact with one of us to farm pickup or market purchase and right on through the cooking process. Was there something that we did that made you smile or did you notice something that we could improve upon? Let us know, we're grownups, we can take it! Try to keep it PG rated though.

This year will hopefully be our best ever, which is what we want to say every year! '08 was sure busy. Many improvements were made around the farm, ranging from pasturing the laying hens, getting electric and water service out to the pasture and new hoop house, and installing a walk in cooler just in the nick of time to hold all those Thanksgiving turkeys. We again have plans for the farm in '09 from fencing to new critters.

We also hope to expand our customer base and get some more store sales. We were contacted by several area stores that will hopefully begin to purchase our meats and eggs. Just being asked is a pretty big honor! We already supply one store in Chelsea, the New Chelsea Market, with our eggs and one Ann Arbor restaurant, Vinology, with meat, poultry and eggs. And very soon, The Produce Station in Ann Arbor will be carrying our eggs too. It is a great feeling when we are contacted and they say: "We heard about you from so and so and we'd like to work something out with you." We like to think we're doing something right and not just on the "healthy eating band wagon".

Opinions are definitely changing in the way people view food. You are not content any more with whatever the store puts out in the meat section. Knowing where your food comes from and who is raising it is something that

our ancestors never thought about. They automatically knew because they lived close by their food. Could you imagine hooking up the Conestoga wagon in California and heading to New York with beef or chicken? Now it's an everyday occurrence! Meat travels an estimated 1500 miles from processor, to store, to you. Now that's a well-traveled meal! Eggs are collected everyday from those mega-chicken farms and stored for who knows how long until they are trucked to wherever they are to be sold. Mega-farms raise their animals on concrete, wedged in to get as many in one lot as they can. Their goal is quantity...



...Our goal is quality!

Our animals are allowed to move about freely. (Yes inside the fences, we don't cater to coyotes.) They are raised on pasture until the snow flies when they are brought up closer to the barn for their own protection. So we raise these products for the changing times; that means to allow the animals full expression of their genetic possibilities.

With that said, let's begin.

Our expectation of **broiler chicken** this year is such that we plan to raise over 1600 to meet the demand for these birds. Still by far our best seller. Sometimes we get some real thumpers, but for the most part they are 4 to 5 lbs.

They are firm of flesh and have a yellow tint to the skin that comes from munching on pasture greens.

They do not have much fat because they are allowed to move around in their portable pens, which are moved everyday to a new fresh spot in the pasture where the birds act like stubby little lawn mowers devouring grass, bugs and anything else that may cross their path.



They are fed a grain ration along with a natural vitamin/mineral supplement that is mixed with the feed. When they reach the right size, they are taken by us - not shipped - to the processor where they are run through one batch - not 20,000 - at a time. They are bagged and separated in the cooler so as not to get mixed with anybody else's. We pick them up the same day and store them in our walk in cooler (or freezer) until you pick them up. We expect to have broiler chickens available every other week or so, and more available for sale at the Chelsea Farmers Market.

**Turkeys** are raised very similar to the broilers. They essentially eat the same grain, grass and bugs except for in larger quantities. They are housed the same and moved everyday the same as the broilers. This past year we had several Toms that were very large. We know some of you were surprised at the size of those birds, but like nature, we get whatever we get. Plus everybody loves leftovers; some of those birds could have fed a whole town! Still, we will do our best to keep the weight down a bit.



**Young Bourbon Red Turkey**

This year we will have more Heritage birds, probably Bourbon Reds and Blue Slates. Heritage birds take twice as long to grow up; they slowly grow into their bodies. They have more dark meat and are an excellent-eating bird. They will go fast so if you want to try one, don't delay.

The rest of the birds will be the same large white turkey that is in every grocery store at Thanksgiving, but there is no comparison how ours are raised compared to the mega turkey hut. Our barns could hold as many as they cram in theirs but they have a nation to feed and we're content to feeding just our friends. So looks like you win.

We raised **ducks** for the first time last year and they did great. We sold the bulk of them to the restaurant Vinology and they went over wonderfully with their customers. Thanks Chef Brandon. So ducks are on the list again for this year for everyone. Again they are raised the same way the broilers and turkeys are, in our portable pasture pens. When mature our White Pekins will dress out around 4 lbs. They are all dark meat with little fat. Duck can be grilled or oven roasted, made into soup or whatever you want. These are one of my favorites and my kids love duck too!

We sell **goat** meat by the half or whole. Don't let this intimidate you, it's not like a side of beef. They aren't nearly as big; maybe 35-45 pounds for a whole goat. It won't take up all your freezer space. Cuts are smaller and there are fewer of them. Goat meat is rising in popularity. Americans are finding that goat meat is very tender, flavorful and fits well in many dishes usually reserved for lamb. Goat can be grilled, roasted, added into stews and soups, or whatever you want.

Our goats live on pasture 'til the snow hits. Then they are fed our baled hay, which came from the same fields that they pasture on. We usually kid in late spring so as to give the newborns a good chance to get going. Too early and the kids may not do well or not even survive the cold weather. We take our meat animals to process the first of the following year that they were born. At less than a year old, that makes for very tender meat.



This year we plan to use the goats for a little land clearing. We have about 20 acres that have been left to grow wild and now it's time for a cleanup. We'll get some fencing up and turn the goats loose. Goats are an excellent brush-clearing animal as they would rather eat

browse than grass, so we are going to put them to work. I'm sure they'll love it!

We bought our 2008 **lambs** and unfortunately they were not very big. They did well on pasture; it's just their genetic makeup was such that they didn't get to the 120 lbs we would have liked. This year we have our own breeding stock of Katahdins. We bred them with a large-framed ram so we are hopeful for some big lambs this spring that will do us proud. Lamb is awesome on the grill!

Our **pork** adventure is in full swing. Late in October our first litter of piglets was born and we have nine little Tamworths running wild in the barn. Eight are girls with just one poor boy pig. Talk about never getting into the bathroom with all those girls! All nine are doing great and we expect them to be ready for sale in the spring.



**"Precious" and her Nine Piglets**

The Tamworth is a true bacon hog. They are long and lean and they will do great on pasture. Our second gilt (which is a young female that has not given birth) will hopefully have her piglets in April so the supply of pork should be pretty good. Pork is sold by the whole or half. Many parts can be smoked or left fresh for you to smoke on your own if you desire. As with all our animals, there are no growth hormones or steroids to artificially enhance the size of the animal. If the animals are kept clean and happy there is no reason to use that stuff unless your sole objective is to line your own pockets at your customer's expense - not gonna happen!!

Our **rabbit** is gaining in popularity. We get many requests at the Chelsea Farmers Market for them. This is

another great dish at Vinology; their customers sure know what's good! Rabbit is naturally lean and low in cholesterol. And when you pay for rabbit you're paying for mostly meat as the bones don't weigh much at all. We have increased the number of breeding does to accommodate the demand for rabbit. They live in our hoophouse with the laying hens for the winter. Any food that the rabbits drop, the layers scratch through so there are no wasted pellets.

Our **eggs** are some of the best you'll ever have. The yolks are deep yellow not pale as you see from the mega-farms' eggs and they stand up to a lot of abuse. When you whisk them for scrambled eggs you really need to get in there and beat them, they don't just break on their own. During the warmer months the chickens free range, eating grass and bugs, enjoying fresh air and sunshine. During the cold, bleak, snow-filled time, they are snug inside the hoophouse. Farm fresh eggs cannot be beat! When people pick them up we try to warn them that they'll become addicted and store eggs will be out of the picture for good.

Like last year, we will have a small supply of **stewing hens** for sale. These are layers that are not producing eggs anymore. They are some of the tastiest chicken you'll ever have. Being a couple years old they have had plenty of time for the meat to become very flavorful. They make great crockpot recipe birds. These are not for the grill!

Well, that's it. Plenty to keep us busy!

Although we plan to raise many more animals this year, get your **2009 Order Form** in to us quickly. You'll want to make sure to reserve plenty of good food for you, your family and friends!

Also, find an order form at [www.backfortyacres.com](http://www.backfortyacres.com)

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## My Soapbox

Lots of time I rant and rave about all the meat and poultry recalls that have been issued in recent times. I always seem to have plenty of ammunition. This time I'd like to explain to people why we do what we do.

I have been told by people that they would like to farm one day, that they think what we do is wonderful. They see videos of bovines grazing peacefully in the field, the sun is shining, the sky is blue, the cows are swishing

their tails and they're followed by a band of roving chickens scratching and pecking near a babbling brook. Very soothing don't you think? For the most part that is what we see too. Unfortunately that's not always the only thing.

How about a power outage when there are 300 chicks in the brooder and its 2:30 in the morning and all you can think of is "those chicks won't survive long without the generator going"!

Or when a new doe is trying to kid breached twins and if you don't get them straightened out you'll lose the twins and probably the doe also!

Let's say the wind is blowing 50 mph and a tree wipes out the fence and the pigs are on the loose. Now you have your customers' pork supply heading for the neighbor's woods and the Department of Natural Resources says any feral pigs are to be shot on site!

Don't get me going about frozen waterlines!

These are some of the things we deal with, not every day mind you, but they do happen. So why in the world would you put yourself through this aggravation?



**Small Scale Farming**

Farming is a great way of life. It's also hard work, long hours and at times nerve racking. Yet it's a very noble cause. Farmers feed the world, although some better than others. We go to the grocery store and see what's in the meat case and think "where the hell did that come from?" Kansas, maybe Brazil or China?

How was it raised, confinement or pastured, grain-fed or grass-fed? Is it full of pharmaceuticals or did the farmer have a conscience? Well, we're not sure so we're not going to play their game. We'll start our own game where the rules are open for anyone to see. We'll play by the rules of nature; no funny stuff.

We raise our animals at a rate that would make the mega farmer laugh hysterically. We have 11 sheep on 6 acres of pasture; they would have 1200 and it would be a feed lot with high fences and concrete. They would feed

whatever was the cheapest grain or by-product they could truck in. Dump in the antibiotics and away we go!

Our pigs find themselves on 2 acre paddocks of low ground that we want them to till up. Fresh air, sunshine, and all the grass, roots, tubers or whatever they dig up in the ground to eat.

The mega farm would have high fences, concrete and more hogs jammed in one area than you could imagine. They would be fed whatever was the cheapest grain or by-product they could truck in. Dump in the antibiotics and away we go ...again!



**Mega Chicken Farm**

Would you like to know about their turkeys and broilers or do you get the hint?

It takes more time and energy to do this right. These animals were never designed to be raised in confinement or mass produced! They were meant to eat, just like humans, a variety of foods whether it's grains or grasses or bushes or whatever. So in order to do this, we must do things on smaller scales with more hands-on to understand what needs to be done, not just hope the antibiotics kick in before supper.

We raise these animals because today many people do not have the opportunity to farm for themselves. They are at the mercy of the mega farm and government regulations. They tell you what to eat, not what it is you're eating. We raise these animals because we don't want our families to have only one choice, industrial agriculture or nothing. We raise these animals because we truly enjoy them. I love to watch the goat kids romp on their jungle gym or young pigs all huddled together in a pig pile during the cold weather, steam rising up from their bodies from the amount of heat they generate. We raise these animals because we love to see our hard work appreciated by our customers when they arrive to pick up their orders. We raise these animals to make our community a healthier happier place by supplying fresh healthy meat, poultry and eggs. We raise these animals for you!

Thank you for reading.....Kevin