

Greetings friends and family,

As of today we're only three weeks away from the spring equinox. The days are finally starting to get longer and we can sense that spring is just around the corner. Brent's to-do list is ridiculously long as we prioritize new projects and improvements. There is great satisfaction, though, in starting a project and following it to completion and finally crossing it off the list. Here are some of the things we've been working on this winter:



A new building for poultry processing



New fence for more pasture and forest paddocks



A new outdoor brooder for the hundreds of chicks we'll house this year

Besides those new facilities we've got several new products we're excited to introduce for our 2011 season. The first is a new addition to our pastured poultry offerings- heritage breed chickens. Last summer and fall we experimented with growing a small flock of true heritage breed chickens- the Plymouth Barred Rocks. These birds are the breeds that would've been on many American farms in the 1800's. They have not been bred to gain weight quickly like the Cornish Cross or Freedom Ranger chickens. As a result it takes these birds about 20 weeks to reach a weight of 3 pounds. In comparison, it takes a Cornish Cross about 7 weeks and a Freedom Ranger about 9 weeks to reach that same weight. Not only do these birds graze, but they truly forage, spending most of the day in the woods near their pasture looking for goodies and hunting shade in the tree line. Twenty weeks of active foraging and grazing means incredible flavor and texture in the meat of these chickens. It also means a longer commitment on our part, more pasture rotations over the season and closer monitoring of these birds. We prefer to day-range the heritage breed chickens as we do the Cornish Cross and Freedom Rangers, allowing them access to pasture within their protective electronet fencing each day and closing them in bottomless hoop houses at night. The heritage breed chickens prefer to completely free range, often flying over or sneaking under the fence to head to the woods.

The taste of an oven roasted heritage chicken is something that we hadn't experienced until last summer. The heritage breed characteristics lend a wonderful depth to the meat and a flavor that our generation has never known in a chicken. Words can't describe the great flavor and we encourage everyone to try one of these birds this year!

Of course, we'll still be raising the Cornish Cross and Freedom Rangers for your tables this year. The Cornish Rock Cross chickens we raise for our family and yours are great at what they do best- packing on the pounds quickly. They graze on thick grass and grubs until their daily ration of feed arrives. They gobble that down and then they lie around and rest while those calories help the bird grow large legs for great tasting drumsticks and extra large breasts. That's what the birds were bred for and that's what they do best. If you like a lot of white meat on your chickens- this is the bird for you!

The Freedom Ranger broiler is a breed derived from an American and European old heritage breed of chicken and was developed in the early 1960's to meet the highest standards of the French Label Rouge Free Range program. These birds thrive in non-industrial settings and are better able to convert more of the protein in grasses and grubs to pounds on the body. It takes this breed a little longer to reach market weight because the Freedom Ranger chick takes its time savoring pasture, grubs and feed, and it ranges more so it works off some of those extra calories going about its daily business of being a happy chicken. The Freedom Ranger chicken will have a moderate amount of white meat in smaller breasts and more dark meat in the drums, thighs and wings.

The second new product we're offering in 2011 is a Meat Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share. Many of you have mentioned you'd like to purchase pork in bulk but don't have the storage space. A Meat CSA share is a good option for you if you like having a selection of pastured meats to choose from in your own freezer but have limited freezer space. It's also a good choice if you find it hard to make it to the farmer's market every week to purchase fresh pastured meats.

We're offering CSA shares for six months beginning May 2011. Each month's share will be delivered to a pick up point in Roanoke or Bedford or can be picked up at the farm and includes a variety of pastured chicken breeds, pastured pork cuts, sausages, and eggs. There are three sizes of monthly meat shares.

The Sampler: 10 pounds of pastured meats and one dozen eggs per month for six months

The Midlin': 15 pounds of pastured meats and one dozen eggs per month for six months

The Whole Holler: 20 pounds of pastured meats and one dozen eggs per month for six months

At our website www.bramblehollowfarm.com you can see a list of products you'll receive over the six months, see specifics about the CSA, and download an order form. If you'd like a paper copy, please call us and we'll mail you one.

We're continuing our work with the heritage breed Tamworth pigs and will be farrowing three litters of piglets this spring and summer in our pasture farrowing huts. Our pigs are healthy, robust pigs that gain their strength and vigor from a diet rich in pasture grasses, clover, forest forage like acorns, hickory nuts, roots and tubers, and from fresh water and sunshine. Pigs, like chickens, cannot sustain themselves on our pasture alone so we supplement their forage with a non-GMO corn feed milled at nearby Sunrise Feed Mill in Stuarts Draft. We are committed to using only non-GMO corn-based feeds for our chickens and pigs and because of this we have seen a great jump in the price of our feed as the price of this important commodity has risen. As a point of reference, when we started raising pigs in 2006 one 50-pound bag of non-GMO corn feed cost us \$4.50. We now pay \$11.00 for that same amount of feed and just experienced a 30 percent price increase from 2010 to 2011. We can all thank our Federal government and industrial agribusiness for that one...

Because of this we are constantly trying to find ways to reduce our dependence on corn-based feeds. To that end we are undertaking two new projects for 2011. The first is an expansion of our pigs' rotational paddocks, adding several additional acres of forest for them to glean more of their feed from nature's bounty. The second is an experiment in planting crops to feed our chickens from the farm. We're planting several plots of buckwheat, dundale peas, comfrey and mangel beets and the idea is to let the chickens harvest the feed themselves by incorporating the plots in their pasture rotations.

Our product offerings continue to grow and we're happy to now offer our delicious pork products by the cut. Our freezers are stocked with the following:

Bone-in pork chops	Picnic and Boston Butt roasts	Pure pork fat
Boneless pork loin	Ham steaks	Pork liver
Bone-in pork loin	Breakfast sausages	<i>*NEW*</i>
Spare ribs	Italian sausages	<i>T&E Ginger and coriander sausages</i>
Fresh bacon	Garlic bratwurst	<i>Chorizo</i>

Please call or e-mail us to arrange to pick up these products. You can also find our products through www.runner-bean.com and some items are sold at Big Pine Provisions in Roanoke. **We think these products taste best after visiting the farm, seeing where and how the animals are grown and meeting the people that feed, shelter and harvest the food for you. In 2011 our on-farm sales hours will be Mondays from 10am-7pm and other hours by appointment. Please call ahead so we can be here to greet you.**

We're including with this letter a copy of our Pastured Poultry order form. As more and more people are enjoying the benefits of locally-raised foods the demand for these nutritious products is increasing. To be sure your family's needs are met, please pre-order your pastured chickens and pastured turkeys. **Also note in 2011 pick-up days are now on Mondays.** You can come anytime between 10am-7pm to choose your birds. We hope this change gives you more free Saturdays throughout the season. If you are unable to pick up on Mondays we do offer other options that we'll let you know about prior to each pick-up date. We'll follow up with our Forest Fed and Pastured Pork order form in a few months when feed prices have stabilized and we can evaluate our 'more forage, less feed' experiment.

Thank you very much for your continued support of our small farm and our family. At the end of each season when we sit down and decide where to invest our resources for the upcoming year, the relationship we have with our customers drives our decisions. In the midst of uncertain economic times we find our security in your patronage and friendship. By continuing to purchase your meats from us you show us that you value the work we do with pastured animals. That allows us to continue to invest with confidence in you, our customers and friends.

Brent and Anna Wills, Bramble Hollow Farm