

TWO TRACKS ACRES NEWSLETTER

July 2012



“The chickens are messing with me again,” Taik announces to me almost every night when he comes back from putting them away. “I think they do it on purpose. I try to chase them into their coop but instead they just run to the other side.” Every night is a game (for the chickens) and a challenge (for us) to put the birds to bed. When you have to wake up as early as we do, getting to sleep on time is a priority. Unfortunately, the chickens don’t share the same agenda. Chickens settle into their hutches when it begins to get dark, and during the summer months this can be as late as 9:30 to 9:45; a time when I would personally like to be already under the covers. Sometimes we share an epic game of hide and seek among the overgrown grasses before they wander leisurely into their enclosure for the night.

It is even more difficult to catch the birds once it comes time to move them. We have to pick each one up individually and put it into a small cage in the back of the pickup truck. A butterfly net has proved to be a very useful tool when it comes to catching chickens. We just scoop them up off the ground, the net giving us an extended reach of up to five feet.



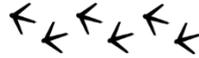
BACON AND SAUSAGE MAKING

Last month we held the bacon and sausage making workshop, and in your share you will be receiving some of the products that we made. We borrowed a heavy duty meat grinder from a friend in exchange for the pig’s head in order to grind the sausage. Many farms operate like this, exchanging not money but tools or food in order to get necessary materials. For this reason, it’s important for farmers to have a strong network with other producers in the area.



After grinding, we mixed spices into the meat in order to create the savory flavors inherent in breakfast sausage, chorizo, Italian sausage, and more. Dried herbs from the farm added an extra ‘oomph’ to the

recipes. Our first batch was lean, without much fat, and we decided to add more fat for the second round. This turned out brilliantly; the sausage extremely juicy and packed with flavor. For the bacon, we chose a smoky brown sugar recipe. Bacon, the meat that comes from the belly of the pig, takes about a week to make. First, it is rubbed with a seasoning, or salt (for ours, we chose brown sugar and salt), and flipped twice a day. Over the week, the bacon loses much of its water content and gains a more concentrated flavor. Finally, it is smoked for two and a half hours to add that final smoky hint of flavor.



HEAT AND DRAUGHT: A REASON TO WORRY



100+ degree days this past month have left us frazzled and worried about our animals. One farmer we spoke with lost 400 chickens to the heat. Another was forced to till his corn field under as a result of not having enough water to irrigate his crop. This is an early warning sign for 2013: increased prices in food due to the draught that has hit the Midwest.

As animal farmers, the increase in grain prices creates a huge obstacle for us. When you raise something at the top of the food chain like meat, you absorb all of those costs below it such as grain prices before reaching your final product. Next year, grain will be scarcer, further raising the cost. Hopefully we will be able to find ways around this, such as using vegetable scraps from friendly farms, recycled whey, and left over barley. Still, the heat and lack of rain has been devastating for farmers.

Luckily, we haven't lost any chickens to the heat. We keep them cool by spraying them down at midday with cold water, as well as soaking the ground that they like to lie on. They don't like being squirted with a hose, but it's for their own good. The pigs have constant access to a mud wallow. Trees and overhangs that we have built provide enough shade to protect them from the worst of the heat.



RECIPE – CHICKEN BONE BROTH

You don't have to throw away your chicken bones! They can be used to make a tasty base for soup, or which can add flavor to anything – soups, sautés, casseroles, rice... the sky is the limit. Here's how: (recipe from www.thekchn.com)

Take the bones from a chicken, either raw or leftover from a chicken roast (if you have heads, necks and feet this is an especially good way to use them) and place them in a large Dutch oven. Add water so that it covers the bones by about two inches. Put a half of a lemon in the pot (or a splash of cider vinegar if you don't have a lemon on hand).

Put into a 275°F oven for about 10-12 hours. I prefer to do this overnight, as I have a very small oven which is almost completely filled up by the Dutch oven. If your oven is larger and heating it all night seems wasteful, try making it in a slow cooker on its low setting or even keep it on a very low flame on the back of the stove.

It's important to not let the broth boil. A very, very gentle simmer is all that is needed. By very, very gentle, I mean that you should see a bubble pop up to the surface every now and then. Check the pot on occasion and add a little more water if needed.

Strain the solids out using a fine mesh strainer and there it is! You can keep your bone broth in the refrigerator for several days or freeze it indefinitely. It should congeal from all the gelatin in the bones when cool. Do not scrape off the fat!

Thank you, Be Well!