

TWO TRACKS ACRES NEWSLETTER

June 2012



We have made it through the first weeks of distribution! Thank you to all for coming out to the Food Hub and the farm; it was great to finally put some faces to your names. A quick note for those of you receiving pork: it's vacuum sealed so it will keep for 3 years if frozen. However, if you take off the packaging, each cut is wrapped individually so it's easier to store (and will still keep for many months in the freezer). Throughout the year you will receive a mix of cuts, primarily sausage, bacon, steaks, roasts, and ribs.

If you have requests for chicken giblets, necks or feet, please let us know by the end of the month so we can make a request next time we go to the processor.



CHICKEN WORKSHOP

Three brave members joined us for the 'Butcher and Process Your Own Chicken' workshop this month. We are happy to report that everything went well and each person left with a fully plucked and gutted bird. Please don't forget to sign up for the 'Sausage and Bacon' workshop followed by the member barbeque on Sunday, June 24.



SAYING GOODBYE

We here at Two Tracks are so excited now that distribution has finally begun. Of course, this means that we have to say goodbye to some of our animals, but we are confident that they were treated well throughout the entire process. For example, we brought the pigs to an Amish butcher, Allan Wickey. Wickey's Butcher Shop is located on his family's farm in Homer, MI. When we pulled up we saw geese waddling in the yard and a big garden and lawn in the front. His children all rushed out to help us unload the pigs. Alan is responsible for preparing all of our sausage and bacon as well.

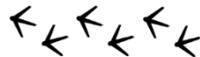
The chickens were taken to a USDA licensed facility in Fowlerville, MI; a small but efficient operation that can take any number and any kind of chicken and finish within the day. We have heard stories about some of the larger processors mixing up chickens with other farms' orders, but we were impressed with Fowlerville's attention to detail. While we were waiting, many other farmers arrived with orders as small as five to ten chickens. Pens filled with all different breeds, from show birds to broilers, filled the room. Another factor in our decision to use the Fowlerville facility is its USDA certification, which allows us to sell to restaurants and at the farmers market, something we hope to begin in the near future.

One hundred more chickens will be arriving soon, so we will be increasing the size of the Two Tracks family dramatically. These will be Freedom Rangers, the same breed we have been using in the past.



ON THE PROWL

There has been some trouble in the chicken coop. A raccoon got in and killed two chickens before we were able to catch it. We have taken it far away (too far for it to be able to find its way back). Chickens are extremely vulnerable to predators and we use a combination of methods to protect our flock. These include an electric fence, shutting the chickens in at night, and lots of human traffic.



Recipe: Brining a chicken – taken from the website smokercooking.com

The salt and sugar in brine make changes to protein that improves its texture and enhances its ability to retain moisture. And that translates into better tasting chicken come dinnertime!

How Brining Works

When chicken or other meat is put into a brine solution, a two-way transfer begins. Juices from the protein are pulled out into the brine, while the brine (along with any [added sugar](#) and flavorings) is pulled in. The end goal is to equalize the level of salt between brine and flesh.

As that's happening, other changes occur. The salt changes the character of the proteins in the meat, breaking them down and loosening their grip on each other. In a way, it causes them to somewhat gel, and makes it harder for moisture to escape when the chicken is cooked. Sugars that are absorbed into the flesh hold on to [water](#), which helps keep the meat even more moist when cooked.

How to Brine Chicken

First, let's start with a basic poultry brine [recipe](#):

1 gallon cold water

1 cup [kosher salt](#)

1/2 cup sugar

Added flavorings

Spices, herbs and other flavors ([chopped onion](#), garlic, celery, etc.) are all fair game. Use your favorites, use your judgment, and don't overdo it. Find a good recipe for more guidance.

Bring 1/2 gallon of the water, the salt and sugar to boil, stirring until both are completely dissolved. Remove from heat, add flavorings, cover and allow to cool completely. Add the remaining 1/2 gallon of water. Refrigerate to below 40 degrees Fahrenheit before adding chicken.

You can cut the recipe in half, or double it as needed, depending on how much chicken you'll be brining. Make enough so the chicken is completely covered in the brining container. If you brine in sealable plastic bag, you'll need less brine than if brining in a bowl.

To keep the chicken submerged, place a heavy plate, or a flat-bottomed bowl filled with some water over the chicken in the brine container.

Keep the brine and chicken COLD during brining, between 36-40 degrees Fahrenheit. If there's room, place the brining chicken in the fridge. If not, brine in an insulated cooler, and place a sealed bag of ice in the brine with the chicken. Don't put loose ice in the brine...when it melts, the brine will be diluted and it won't do its job.

How Long to Brine Chicken

The brining time for a whole chicken is 4 to 8 hours.

After brining, rinse the chicken well in cold, [running](#) water. Pat dry with a clean towel.

Now that the chicken is brined, it's ready to be seasoned with your favorite dry rub and smoked or grilled. Brined chicken usually takes less time to cook, which is another benefit of brining.

If you haven't brined chicken before, you'll definitely notice an improvement in both flavor and texture.

Thanks and until next time,
Be Well!