

TWO TRACKS ACRES NEWSLETTER

May 2016

CSA Pickup Starts Soon

We begin the CSA season the first week in June. If you are a member, please follow up with us to pick a day and time to receive your share.

Markets this Year

Two Tracks will be at the Saturday Chelsea Farmers Market again, which runs 8 am- 1 pm on Main St in downtown Chelsea. We will also be attending a new market this year – Westside Farmers Market at Zingerman's Roadhouse. This takes place Thursdays 3-7 pm starting June 2. Come stop on by and visit us!



Controlled Burn

There is a spot next to our house that has been overgrown and ignored for some time, so we decided we needed to burn it. A controlled burn takes a few people to pull off – there should be someone able to reach every side of the area to make sure the fire doesn't go beyond where it should. You start downwind on one end and light the dry grass on fire, which then makes its way over the entire area, leaving a blank canvass of field behind covered in ash. Our neighbor Ben, Taik and I soaked the edges of the fields with a hose and circled the area, ready with water to put out any rogue flames. But, there was nothing to worry about. We ended up with a cleared area, ready to be planted with whatever we please. I'm thinking buckwheat to crowd out any weeds that come back, for a great food source for the bees, and of course fresh buckwheat pancakes in the fall. Next year I'd like to establish some perennial clover and put some bees in the area.

Bzzzzzzzz

Speaking of bees, I've been tending to some hives with my friend Germaine, a beekeeper in Ann Arbor. She took me out to check her hives this spring to see if any bees had survived the winter. Most hives had died. We pried open the comb and looked at capped honey and bee larvae cells, but no bees. She guessed some had died because of our unusual spring weather. When it warmed up the bees became active and came out from the tight bundle they stay in all winter to keep warm. Then we had another cold snap, which could have killed the bees since they no longer had the body heat of the winter cluster to keep them from freezing.



But not all was lost. As we watched the abandoned honey, I saw many native bees from other colonies land on the hives to eat the honey from the abandoned comb. This is a great food source to jump start the colonies that do survive the winter. I would never have recognized the native bee for what it was – they are smaller and blacker than the domestic honey bees most of us keep in our farms and gardens. A hardier breed, they are better adapted to surviving the harsh Michigan winters.

On another note, the city of Chelsea is now considering passing an ordinance to allow people to keep bees in their backyards. They are currently looking at policy from cities that already allow this like Ypsilanti. Hopefully we should see some changes soon, and more pollinators in our area!

Predator in our Midst

We had 100 chickens this spring, but a predator got 40 of them before they were fully grown. We never found out what the predator was, but I suspect a possum because it killed multiple birds at one time, and didn't eat them all. Now we are extra careful to lock them in at night. Even though they are surrounded by electric netting, a determined animal can still get through.

Automatic Waterer

Work smarter not harder – a motto I wish I lived by more often. But I managed to follow this advice with our new watering system. It's brilliant – an automatic waterer for both the steers and chickens. A hose fills a barrel with water. Once the water reaches the top, it pushes up on a valve that turns off the hose, so that the barrel automatically refills as the animals drink.

We changed the chickens' drinking apparatus to a nipple waterer instead of the upside down





bucket. This is a pipe that hangs above their heads with nipples all along the bottom. The water fills the pipe and the chickens peck at the nipples to get the water. It took them a minute to figure it out, and we had to put their faces in the water to teach them to peck. But once one got it, the rest caught on quickly. I used to have to haul buckets out to the animals every morning full of water to fill their containers. Now I just make sure it's working, and the rest takes care of itself.

Is it a Deer? A Plane? No it's a.... Pig

The Grange Kitchen and Bar bought one of our pigs for their restaurant, which I delivered in two halves to the front door (their side door was blocked). After helping carry it in, Chef Brandon Johns and I took a trip to check out a garage that had been converted into a kitchen equipped to process deer and animals. The next day Chef Brandon taught a craft butchery class at the converted garage. He showed us all how to break down a whole pig into its parts, and then walked us through the process of making sausage, bacon, and various charcuterie techniques.



He also told me an interesting story. After I delivered the pig, the Health Department contacted him and said someone had called in a tip that they had seen a person bringing a deer into the restaurant, and were concerned about the food that was being served. So Brandon had to show the inspector that it was in fact legitimate, and a pig. Watch out, you never can tell what those passersby are thinking.

Until next time, be well!