

October 6, 2025

Another Season, Another Sunset

One thing is always for certain on the farm, a season will come, and a season will go. One season might be better than the other, but no two seasons are ever the same.

There just seems to be something about this year. It just seems to be one of the hardest years on the farm in the last five years. Maybe it was the difficult weather, the constant breakdowns at the beginning of the season, or the increased costs on all the products we need. If we are being honest though, this season was not just difficult “on the farm” with products we raise and grow, it was also hard for



programming and “enjoyment.” As we went into the year of 2025, there was excitement around helping people through the power of horses for ten years. There was hope that people would enjoy an open house and see the progress, hope that we would have more signups for programs, hopes that we would have a successful season with horses and so many more hopes. However, that was not what we got.

The challenges showed up big from lack of enrollment, lame horses, health conditions, minimal community support during fundraisers, and the goals for the year getting missed at each marker from lack of time spent with the horses. It was difficult to bring that “spark” out that was once there ten years ago. Maybe it was confidence, the struggles to find volunteers, or just the need for a heart change (but not wanting to admit it), the season was a challenge. To be honest, it still is a challenge, because the “what’s next” is replaying over and over. If there is one thing that the farm has taught me, it is that there is a time for the sun to set on some seasons in life.

In fact, my favorite hymn from growing up was called the “**Hymn of Promise.**” The line that I can reflect on in this season of life, is “from the past, will come a future, what it reveals a mystery.” These last ten years with the horses and helping people has given me so much to learn and grow from, and if there is one thing I do know, I am not done yet, but there does need to be a change. After a weekend away learning about how others are helping people with horses, I came home to this beautiful sunset around the horses and I have looked at the picture several times since. The sun



might be setting one era here on the farm, but God has big plans for the next season with not only helping to feed people, but to help people enhance their daily lives through equines.

This fall, as we work on growing more food, feeding more people, it will also be a time of reflection. A time to “re-ignite” the passion, encourage new board members to hop on, fundraise money, and create great experiences for youth and adults alike around our equines. Last weekend while in Virginia there was hope for the direction change, there was encouragement, so much learning, and a desire to bring change to an existing program and create that space for the community. Just as my favorite song says, “in our doubt there is believing” and I believe that God is leading us to make a change with the program. So I

encourage you to think about checking out Big Maple Farm’s Natural Therapies volunteer opportunities as a board member, a volunteer, or a community supporter. There is so much good in feeding people, but there is even more in seeing a kid talk, walk, or build their communication from the power of a horse.

Never a Day Without Learning

The farm is always a place to learn and grow with each experience and we are entering a new experience and hoping to learn some new things from the process. St. Marys school district has brought in the FFA program this year and while Garrett is participating the 97 other students are also looking at projects. Garrett has selected rebuilding a tractor and raising some broiler chickens, other students have selected volunteering at the horse program, raising sheep, goats, pigs, and more. While one student also wanted to show a steer. After some searching and word of mouth getting back to us here at the farm, the teachers were struggling to find a steer. So we offered for the student to look at one of ours. We knew there would be a process. Our three calves outside have never been to the barn, handled, or even as close as we need them to get towards people. First step, we need to catch the steer. Next step, tame him down. Well we went through plans, a, b, c, d, y, z, and t. We finally got him in the barn with a combination of all our best laid plans. Now on to step two, tame him down so we can get near him to start the halter breaking process. Thankfully the student who is working with him is doing some of the work too, but we have him coming to us so we just gotta keep going with it. Hopefully she will be walking him out of the barn on to the trailer within the coming weeks and working towards her end goal of showing him. We can’t wait to see the progress and how much we too learn from the entire process. Next up, we have some students waiting on some baby lambs. Let’s hope our timing is what they need.



Farm Updates

Well, we have officially hit the 1,000 canned goods here at the farm. We have canned 1,190 jars of food and we still have a few more products to work on, so we will get over our goal. We can’t wait to hear how you enjoy them. We have also started digging potatoes. The yield is not what we were hoping for and we are looking at a solution for selling them a little differently this year.

Turkey Raising

Raising turkeys has been something we stepped into about 4 years ago and at first it was a HUGE learning experience. We didn't realize just how fragile turkeys were as small babies. We also learned how fast they grew or how slow others grew. Over the years we have learned so much and really perfected our method with raising turkeys. Now don't get us wrong, there is always bumps in the road but there is also the fun parts. Turkeys are extremely vocal and desire to hear you talk, so every morning, time we walk by them, or just going around, we always make it a point to talk to the turkeys and they talk back. The way they run and play is much different than a chicken and is totally fun to watch. However, the best part is knowing that our attention and care for them is what brings out a great Thanksgiving for so many. That is the best part of farming, knowing that what we learn and do for our animals also leads to a great final product for you.



If you haven't taken the time to order your Thanksgiving Turkey, the reservations are going fast. A \$40 deposit is required and turkeys will be \$5.25 a pound. The Turkeys are looking really nice and will be ready before we know it. Be sure you check out how to order them from Amanda, you don't want to miss out on our great tasting birds for the big holiday meal.

Education Doesn't Stop in School

If there is one thing that we want to instill in our kids, it is that learning never stops. We want the boys to value learning and growing so this past week, Tony and I headed off to a day of learning about regenerative farming practices. It was such a great day of learning together and realizing that what we know and are trying to do, doesn't even scratch the surface. There is so much more that needs to be learned and we need to gain a better understanding of what we really want to do. We learned how putting the soil quality first is going to be the biggest game changer in how our products grow and how we move our animals through pastures, crops we raise, and so much more.

Not only did we learn about great methods about taking care of our soil, but we learned about technology that really would be a game changer. In fact we were talking on our drive to this farm tour about shock collars for horses and leave it to us to find out that they actually do make them (LOL). Just not for horses, but cows, sheep, and goats actually can wear shock collars. If you look close at this herd of cows, they are moved rotationally through pastures with the collars on their necks. This method saves the farm from investing in mobile fence, the constant



need to go move the fence, and the maintenance of said fence. Totally sold on this idea! There is for sure some great technology for the farmers and learning how to be more efficient and raising more animal units and a great produce selection is our ultimate goal with better methods and less input costs. We found out this can be done, we just need a great place to start. So if you see us someday visiting with another farmer, just know we invested in a consultation and are fully invested in learning where to start and how to move forward from the paths we have already started.



Winter GARDENING

Growing Your Own Food can be year round!

Gardening is not just limited to outdoors and we can continue to grow certain items through the winter.

JOIN THE MASTER GARDENERS OF ELK/CAMERON COUNTIES TO LEARN HOW TO:

- Utilize Grow Lights
- Temperature Control
- Good items to grow in the winter
- Types of containers to use/space for plants

October 23rd
5pm-7pm
St. Mary's Public Library
814-776-5331
arb334@psu.edu

PennState Extension
Master Gardener

REGISTER HERE:

Upcoming Learning Opportunities

Many of you know that I work Part Time for the Penn State Ext. Office as the Master Gardener Coordinator. I truly enjoy the program and what it stands for because even though I am called to be a farmer and feed people, and in this position I can help a great group of individuals who are trained to teach others find new ways to help. We currently have a class at the End of October perfect for you to learn about growing some great food during the winter. Just because we live in PA, doesn't mean we can give up on growing ourselves some great food. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate reaching out.

Eggs, Maybe!

Well we are coming down to the end of the summer with a very short fall on our eggs this year and we are just trying to put together some possible reasons why. The weather for sure did not help with our creek and pond drying up, along with the heat, and lack of bugs. We knew the chickens were just stressed, however we still haven't seen things pick up but it is unseasonably hot still. We wanted to look at another piece of the puzzle. Chickens can struggle with mites in the fall. The itchiness from them on their skin can stress the chicken causing them to deplete of needed minerals and vitamins for laying eggs. We typically wash their legs to help with this however, one day a video came up showing us an easier method and so we tried it. Just going at the base of the chicken's neck and placing a couple drops of Ivermectin Pour on will help kill the mites. So we took to the coop after every one was settled and started catching and marking them once they were done. The process went much faster than the whole washing of their legs and we should start to see results if that was the problem within a week. So cross your fingers, we might be looking at more eggs soon.



Reading Fun With Horses

This fall we have been blessed with a group of school kids visiting the farm for six weeks. Each week the kids come and hang with us for a couple hours and we work on different skills right alongside our equine friends. The great thing is watching the kids work on skills that they struggle with, and succeeding to the best of their ability. Some might not know all their letter sounds, but boy if they don't want to try to show their friend. Some might have struggles with writing, but they love trying and we love encouraging that. It has been such a great thing to see these kiddos learn and grow in the last 3 weeks. We can't wait to see where they will be after their final 3 weeks here visiting with their favorite horse, Fiona. When you donate, participate in a fundraiser, or attend an event here at the farm, these are the moments you are supporting.



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