

Fall Newsletter 2011

Greetings from the Farm

I'm making ice cream today and as I'm watching that big green flywheel turn and listening to the slushy crackle of ice and rock salt rubbing against a steely cylinder, I'm transported back in time for sure. It's 1954 and a lanky six year old with freckles and a cowlick is watching his Mama work an old "White Mountain" five quart churn and begging to take a turn at the crank. It's my first recollection of the magical process of freezing sweet cream. It would be many years later before I would understand who owned the real magic. I'm referring, of course, to the semi-domesticated bovines of the Taurus family, we call cows. And who can argue? What or who else on earth, can convert grass, the most common plant on earth, the most efficient solar collector on earth into leather for wearing, filet mignon for savoring, cheese for giving pizza reason to exist, and cream as in ice cream for the pure celebration that is life. It's a Merlinesque feat of infinite stature done with an ease and casualness that defies reason. Can you imagine man trying to create a machine that could do it? First, it would cost in the billions, would have to be petroleum powered of course, and use some fractural derivative of the corn-plant, require huge subsidies, necessarily be irradiated for your safety, and be artificially flavored, colored, fortified and taste somewhere left of soymilk. Compare that Herculean effort to that of the cow whose biggest worry is finding a shady spot in which to chew its cud. Magic in the first degree!

So what has possessed me to spend a whole day every other week making 25 or so gallons of ice cream? Aside from the obvious, guaranteed induction into the Grandpa Hall of Fame (my grandkid's peers may boast that their grand-dads have hair growing from their ears and nose and sport the frumpy smell of old people, my grandkids can see that bet and raise them the fact that their Grandpa also has his own ice cream dipping cabinet) Royal Flush every time. The reason I've got the 20 quart "White Mountain" churn going is that we make homemade ice cream to sell at our Farmers Markets booths to supplement our farm income. As pricy as grass-fed beef is, there's not a lot of profit there. Compared to grain-fed, it takes me about twice the time to "finish" a cow on grass yet I only end up with half the meat. That factor of four means that grass-fed should cost four times as much. Let's see, that would put hamburger at around \$16 per pound. Wow, I'd be embarrassed to ask that price which is why we charge \$6.50 per pound. Oh well, grass-fed is at least four times better than grain-fed in all categories except my bank account so I guess I'll have to be satisfied with that. It does, however, put me in the company of legendary South Carolina State football coach, Willie Jefferies, who once quipped, "I was born with nothing and have somehow managed to hold on to most of it."

Hacked off

Nancy and I recently attended a buyer's market at the South Carolina Farmer's Market sponsored by the South Carolina Specialty Foods Association of which we're members. We were there to showcase Nancy's Kiwi Jam to potential buyers from gift shops to Whole Foods to even Wal-Mart. We had a really good time offering sample tastes and chatting up Nancy's creation from our orchard. We met many interesting people who were generous with compliments and even took more orders than we

expected. We were practically giddy by the time we arrived home having mapped out our world-wide strategy for conquering the jam market. So it was more than a little disconcerting when I hit the button on the answering machine and found four messages from friends suggesting I check my e-mail account; looks like you've been hacked. Talk about a mood breaker. As I listened to them describe the message they had received; something about me attending a conference in the UK, losing my bag and money and needing them to send \$1800 so I could get home, I felt that empty pit in my stomach getting deeper and wider. I went straight to the computer and tried to login but was denied. Disgust rapidly progressed to rage as I realized some heartless hoodlum lacking a soul had somehow changed my password and pirated my e-mail account and was soliciting money from my friends. It took three days and help from my much smarter than me daughter-in-law to regain control.

The frustration is that I can't grab this sub-human by the scruff of the neck and "splain" to him why he ought not be doing that. He lives in a shadowy cyber-space world of ones and zeros and cruises in its sea of anonymity. Boy, would I like to introduce him to my herd bull, Casey when he's in one of his moods.

Nancy told me not to worry about it; that no one would believe that as tight as I am that I'd spring for a trip to England and besides no one could make up those silly stories I write about anyway. I'm still trying to spin that into a compliment but it maybe more than a freckle-faced frumpy old farmer with a cowlick combover can manage.

"at his best man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst" -Aristotle 384-322BC

Thanks for allowing us to be your grass-farmers and if you ever receive a message asking for money, it won't be from us.

The Olivers at River Run Farms