

Newsletter Spring 2011

Greetings from the farm,

I've decided farming is the exact opposite of that old army mantra of "hurry up and wait." Farmers wait for spring during the brown season of winter piddling around doing all those little chores and repairs in kind of a bored anticipation. Then they wake up one morning and their world has transformed, seemingly overnight, to green and they're instantly in hurry up mode already a month behind. For grassfarmers, we go from not nearly enough grass (some say too many cows) to way too much grass (too few cows). Believe me, too much grass is a luxury problem I'd like to deal with all year.

Something for nothing

Most of you know we opened a little farm store this past fall and we're pleased with our progress. Many of our Charleston area friends have driven the hour up here to purchase from us during the closed market time and it's heartening to us that you're willing to commit to that kind of effort in our support. Thanks for making sustainable agriculture a priority. Not everyone understands the concept. The first day we opened our store, I painted up some farm signs and placed them along the Hwy fence approaching the store. One said "Grassfed Beef," another "Pastured Poultry" and still another "Free-Range Eggs." They weren't professional but they had kind of a farm flair to them; I was kind of proud. The first three cars to stop all wanted to know if I was really giving away eggs. I swear it's the truth! I got a real chuckle out of the first three. The next thirty or so to date, however, have really started to irritate me. I'm not sure what disturbs me the most. Is it that our education system is so inadequate that people don't really understand what "free-range" means or is it that our collective mindset is such that we really expect something for nothing? I'm not sure how much more we could expect from a system that proudly advertises its funding source as "The SC Education Lottery." Disturbing on so many levels.

Despite an opening day that had us questioning our fence row ad campaign, we're gratified that we can justify being open on Saturdays. We're open for more than just commerce though. The store puts a face on the farm; one that shows those passing by that there is a choice in food production. Small-scale, sustainable, chemical free, environmentally safe and humane are the messages I hope this little store and farm convey. Maybe those are the signs I should put on the fence.

Molly, Maude, and Lucille

No, it's not a pitch for a new "Golden Girls" pilot. Maude and Molly are my two Belgian draft horses; each approximately the size of my Toyota truck. And Lucille is Mama Lucille, mother for my 62 years of her 80. Mama Lucille is a child of the depression and listening to her stories of a harsh but happy childhood sharecrop farming in the 30's helped shape my love of agriculture and disdain for waste. She has a quick wit, an easy smile, an infectious laugh, and a devotion and sacrificing loyalty to family I've not known anywhere else. I see a lot of her good traits in my children and I hope they see a few in me. We share a love for fried oysters, whole hog barbeque, and anything old. With two out of three of these in mind, I hooked up the horses to my 100 plus year old

wagon and we “struck” a course to Sweatman’s Barbeque, 6.5 miles from the farm’s gate. It was a Saturday late in Feb, one of those perfect bluebird days, 66 degrees, a light breeze with a little south to it. If indeed it was a day God made, then he was really showing off.

It’s a route mostly of dirt roads and with the exception of an occasional vehicle, absent of modern reminders. It required only light imagination to place ourselves in the late 1800s when the south was a simpler place. The rhythmic clop of dinner plate sized hooves on a hard packed dirt road is a sound felt as much heard, resonating deep into your soul. On board was Mama Lucille, sister Olivia, daughter Nance and grandkids Asher and Adelyn who were helping me drive from the front seat. The three generations of Oliver women in folding chairs (our only surrender to modern comfort) in back kept up a lively banter punctuated with much laughter for the 2 hour trip. Our arrival was met by the rest of the family and a sumptuous meal of the South’s best barbeque unfolded. Honestly the barbeque is split hog, slow cooked over an oak and hickory coal pit and is so good us locals are hesitant to say much about it for fear the secret may escape anonymity.

The route home was equally glorious with a warm sun flickering through the western pines. Molly and Maude’s gate seemed a bit more enthusiastic as we approached the farm as I’m sure they anticipated a well earned rest and the extra oats they always get after a pull. As I washed them down and fetched their oats the thought occurred to me that this was a perfect day. Wonderful family, beautiful horses, gorgeous weather, and fine southern barbeque; I believe I’ve already won the lottery.

“When you get something for nothing, you just haven’t been billed for it yet.”
-Franklin P. Jones; American Businessman; 1887-1929

P.S. The market season begins April 9th and we’ll be in Charleston at Marion Square each and every Saturday. Les will be manning the store here at home. Hope to see you one place or the other.

Thanks for allowing us to be your grassfarmers,

The Olivers of River Run Farms

