

Summer Newsletter 2010

Greetings From The Farm

I usually don't write a summer newsletter, but events both good and bad compelled me. First the good!

It's my great pleasure to announce the latest edition to our farm family, Lucy Allen Oliver, born May 3rd. Debuting at 8lbs 1oz, she is a beautiful (from her mom), red haired (from her dad), blue eyed (not sure from where) "gurl baby." Her parents, Les and Page, while proud, don't hold a candle to her grandparents, Nancy and I who are over the moon. I can't wait to take her picture in the little Annie Oakley cowgirl outfit that I will buy for her, standing beside the little Angus heifer (born on her birthday) that I have already given her. Life's a trip for sure. Just when you think between the economy, global warming, e-coli and that thing in the gulf (more on that later) all hope is lost, along comes hope itself. Surely God's optimism in mankind is evident in the birth of every precious child. That certainly places a heady responsibility on all of us to not so thoroughly screw things up that she and her peers won't have a chance to fix it. Thanks God and Go Lucy.

Peak Oil

This mess in the Gulf got me thinking about my Uncle Mike so I called him up to get his take on it. Mike is my daddy's youngest brother and he is only 8 years older than me so growing up we palled around a lot and of course to me, he was the cat's meow. Smart as a whip, there was nothing he couldn't do, at least in my eyes. He once, at around age 15, took a discarded lawn mower and a piece of a bicycle and somehow combined the two into a rather rough facsimile of a moped. It was the late 50's and we rode that thing around the farm all one summer before it took its last breath in a wheezing fit of blue smoke. Anyway, Mike went off to Clemson University and returned four years later with a mechanical engineering degree and the distinction of the family's first college graduate. My daddy loaned him a hundred dollar bill and along with his 1956 Studebaker he headed off to Louisiana for a 40 something year career in the oil industry. That Studebaker, by the way, was the one that was pointed on both ends and when at rest it was a puzzlement discerning its intended direction.

He worked mainly in designing, engineering and testing the drill bits that allow companies like BP to drill miles down in multi directional ways. He has spent lots of time on drilling site locations and I was interested in his

perspective. I could tell by his tone the depth of his sadness. His prediction was that many years will pass before those beloved marsh bayous recover, if ever. His bottom line is that as a nation we probably should not have been drilling there in the first place. He talked about the enormous water pressures at that depth pushing one way and the even more enormous oil pressures heading someplace else; a most difficult situation to control from a mile away.

Over the years we have talked a lot about our dependence on the cheap energy that oil represents. I heard for the first time from Mike the term “Peak Oil”. When describing a finite resource like fossil petroleum, there is a point at which maximum production is reached. In the case of oil, most experts think the current daily worldwide production of 90 million barrels is it (Peak) and corresponds to roughly half our God given endowment. On the surface, that does not seem so bad, looks like another 100 years or so of happy motoring, but not so fast. Mike says we’ve used up the easy to get to half, that the remaining half will require more energy, more risk and more environmental desecration to get to. On top of that, all those folks in China and India want to ride too. Who’s to tell them they can’t, certainly not us Americans who use the largest share of the world’s oil. So if production is maxed and consumption demand balloons, it doesn’t require a PhD to figure that shortages and high prices are what’s coming. I won’t depress you or myself by listing how our lives will change sans oil, but if the thought of living without it does not make you shutter, it should. As a farmer, my thoughts are how we will produce our food. Granddaddy always said eating will be the last thing people give up (of course he did not live long enough to see the current cell phone addiction). Granddaddy farmed during the 30’s and 40’s with horses and mules and one old tractor that was not near as powerful as the average lawnmower of today. He produced 5 calories of food for every calorie of fossil fuel he used. Today the average farmer uses 10 calories of petroleum to produce 1 calorie of food. And folks, the horses and mules are long gone along with most of the knowledge of sustainable food production. Yet our farm bill and other government sponsored programs encourage only a continuation down this unsustainable and insane path as if we can “eat” oil forever. As that well continues to gush it’s kind of ironic that what we so depend on to produce our food is so thoroughly destroying a pristine food source, the Gulf. Lucy, you so deserve better!

“And they were sure and certain, forever wrong, but always confident. They had no hesitation, they confessed no ignorance or error, and they knew no doubts”.

-Thomas Wolf

“You Can’t Go Home Again”

Thanks for allowing us to be your grass farmers,

The Olivers of River Run Farms

P.S. Due to equipment issues, (Les hit a deer and damaged some of our stuff) we will only be at the downtown Charleston market every Saturday and not at Mt. Pleasant on Tuesday. To our Mt. Pleasant friends, we invite you to visit us downtown.