

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE FARMING : ADVENTURES IN CATTLE, VOL. 2

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Sustainable Farming : Adventures In Cattle" has been transposed directly from the website. That includes references to the PlayHaven Farm LLC and Green Building Project (PHF&GBP) website pages, external websites, links to documents, etc. Because of how quickly things change on the internet, there are NO links from this document.

THE FIRST VETERINARY VISIT (APRIL 2015)

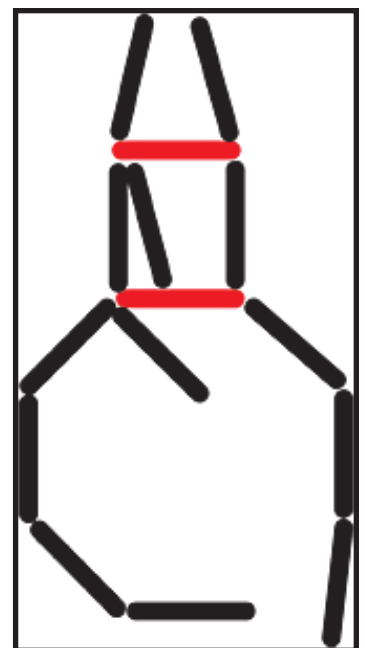
Since we had a bull calf last summer, we knew that we would have to get a local veterinarian out here sooner or later to castrate him. Well, that time came. I contacted the Odessa MO vet recommended by our mentor and found out that: Yes, they do farm visits (a fee for that). Yes, they will bring the shute/head gate (another fee for that, but less than buying or renting one, definitely). Price for castration depends on the size of the calf. Yes, they can tag as well (for a fee).

Phew, well, we decided to figure out exactly what else we needed done so we could get the 'bang for our buck', LOL. Since we are selling the heifer calf, she needs vaccinations and after talking with our mentor, we decided to go ahead and vaccinate the bull calf as well. Fernie (the bull) lost his ear tag last year, so he gets a new one.

We needed to set up a temporary pen to contain the herd and lead into the vet's shute. I contacted our mentor to see if he knew where we could rent the panels/gates for this in addition to recommending to us a configuration for our needs. I had been out on the internet and there are SO many ways to set up a temporary pen, I was feeling rather intimidated.

Our mentor is such a wonderful guy! He offered to show us his set-up and then offered to let us borrow his portable pen panels. Wow, the generosity of people renews my faith in humankind. We graciously and gratefully accepted (he wouldn't hear of us renting them from him) and found a mutually acceptable time to head over to his farm and see his setup and then help take down the panels and load them onto the custom carrier for transport to our place.

Once at our pasture, our mentor and the hubby set them up quicker than I could watch. They used 13 panels and 2 gates (see the diagram). The portable panels have a tube (top and bottom) on one end and hooks (top and bottom) on the other end. The hooks go into the tubes of the next panel and have a small hole in the end for a cotter pin or wire to help keep the cattle from lifting the panels and separating them. Our mentor showed us how to set it up so that one panel (inside the big circle) is used to make a shute to the gate. You open the gate so it lays against that panel and is out of the way, but is easy to shut behind whomever goes through the gate. The other 'extra panel' is in the area between the gates and swings to minimize



the area which makes it more difficult for the animal to turn around and therefore head through the next gate into the chute.

Of course, there has to be an opening into the big circle, so you simply don't attach 2 panels and leave an opening for the cattle to enter. Then when everyone is inside the circle, you shift the panels and attach them to each other.

Another point about the panel setup. Our mentor suggested several lengths of chain and extra wire so we could put extra protection from cattle pushing on the panels and disconnecting them. There is no such thing as overdoing it when it comes to big, bulky, smart animals.

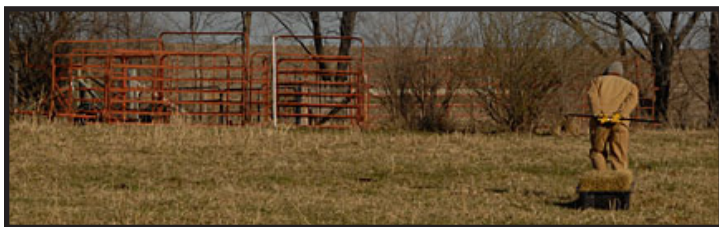
We were able to do all this on Thursday evening (3-26) and called the Vet on Friday morning to set up the appointment for the following Monday morning at 11:00 am. We asked them to come to the farm, bring the chute (head gate), number tags for three (3) cattle, and whatever was necessary to castrate one (1) and vaccinate two (2) calves. Which vaccinations did we want? We wanted what the vet recommends for our area in addition to brucellosis for the heifer calf.

To band or not to band, that is the question. Banding is one way to castrate a bull calf, the other is by cutting. Either way has its benefits and both have their drawbacks. We opted to band this time. Basically, the Vet puts a really REALLY small rubber band around the top of the scrotum and that cuts off the blood supply which then enables the testes and scrotum to gangrene and fall off on their own. (I can see all males reading this crossing their legs at this point, LOL.) From what I read on the subject, the area goes numb very quickly so pain is minimal.

OK, so with the appointment set, we knew how long we would have the portable panels and that meant our mentor could get them late Monday or whenever after that he was free.

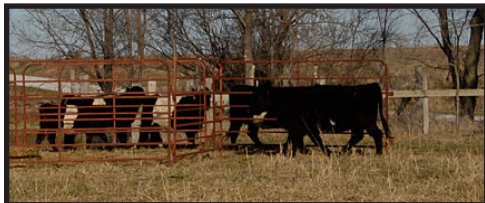
Since our cattle are used to moving through the pasture due to rotational grazing AND since they have been getting a bale of hay twice (and sometimes three times) a day during the winter, it was pretty easy to lead them to the pen and get them inside to eat their hay meals leading up to Monday morning. There was no fear of the pen at all.

Monday morning turned out to be a glorious, calm, warm day and we waited a little later than usual to give the cattle their hay, so they were definitely ready to follow the hubby to the pen.



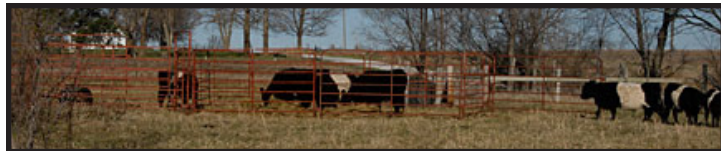
The hubby heading to the pen with hay. He is pulling it in a sled that we found at one of the hunting supply businesses.

The cattle have seen him and are heading to the pen.



This is Button. She is the lead cow. You know how we know that she is the lead cow? It's because she leads the others. Sounds like a punchline, but it's true.

One by one, the others file into the pen to get the hay.





Of course, Fernie (the bull) likes to be different and was being obstinate about moving with the rest of the herd.

Everyone is in the pen enjoying the hay... and there's Fernie way off in the background of the picture below, NOT in the pen. But it was only a matter of time before Fernie decided it was HIS idea to go get hay in the pen.

The hubby went back to get a second bale as added incentive and in his absence, Fernie made his way to join his family (in his own sweet time, LOL). I shifted the panel behind him and the hubby attached it when he got back.



You can see the top connecting scheme of the panel clearly in the photo at left. All in and no problems.

They only had to wait a couple of hours in the pen before the Vet was due.



The gate is open all the way and the cattle have ventured in and out of the little area between the gates a few times.

The hubby had the gate to the pasture open so the Vet could drive in. It was a quick maneuver to get the head gate/shute in alignment with the panels and the hubby attached it to the panels after the Vet lowered it from travel position to ground position. (I found that fascinating.) Since there are so many moving parts on that shute, it was important for the hubby to position chains and wire so it did not interfere. He did a great job.



This thing is amazing! There is a lever on both sides that changes the position of the axle (that is my guess) so that when traveling the shute is up off the ground. And when the lever is changed, the shute sits directly on the ground.



We confirmed with the Vet what he was doing and he set about gathering what he needed while the hubby moved the cattle in the pen so someone would end up in the space between the two (2) gates. Beginners luck was with us and both calves made their way into the area. When the Vet was ready, he pulled up the barrier to his shute and we 'pressed' the calves to make one of them decide to step into it.



The bull calf was first and it is amazing how well the head gate held him in position. There was some bucking, but that stopped quickly when he figured out it wouldn't get him free. A couple of shots, an ear piercing and the banding happened very quickly and efficiently; and then he was free to roam in the pasture.

Fil is done and is now officially #47. The patches of red are just old hair that hasn't come out yet.

I was busy after this watching the Vet and didn't get any pictures of the heifer calf and Fernie in the shute.

The heifer calf was easy to move into the shute and after even less bucking than the bull calf, she settled down. After her shots and ear tag, she also received a tattoo in her other ear and a metal tag with the brucellosis information. This took a little longer because the Vet applied ink to her ear so the tattoo would be visible and it took time for the ink to soak in and multiple applications. But in a few minutes, she too was free to roam the pasture.

The beauty of this set up is that even if the cow you don't want gets into the gate area, it's easy to open the shute and just let it out into the pasture. Which is what happened when Button and Fernie both made their way into the gate area. After some jostling for position, Button went first and we let her pass through into the pasture with the calves.

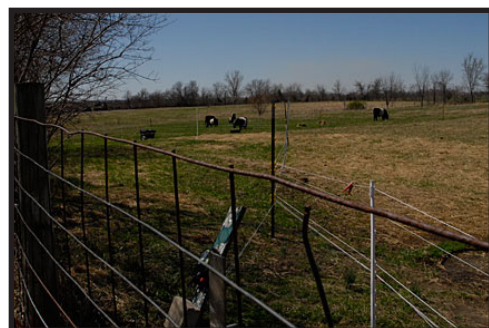
Next came proof that the hubby and I are newbees to working cattle. We forgot about the 'squeeze' panel in the gate area and were failing at getting Fernie to head into the shute. So I asked the Vet for his expertise and he had me hold the rope holding up the barrier into the shute while he climbed the panel and pushed the squeeze panel up against Fernie which then kept him from turning around. We switched places and it was no time at all before Fernie was in the shute with his head in the head gate.

At this point the OTHER proof appeared. The hubby called out that we had forgotten to close the gate from the pasture to the road after the Vet pulled in! OH NO. Button and her bull calf were heading for the road to investigate. The hubby ran wide of them so he would be in the road before they got there and I positioned myself next to the cattle. We herded them back into the pasture without any problems and closed the gate. Phew. The heifer calf was standing on the outside of the pen next to her mother during this event.

By then the Vet had finished putting the replacement ear tag in Fernie's ear and he was free to join the others in the pasture. We opened the pen and the rest of the cattle were happy to follow the hubby to newly opened pasture (they did deserve that reward).

The Vet put his equipment et al way, reconnected his shute to his truck, wrote up our bill and then drove next door to our house for payment and a couple dozen eggs.

Later in the day, we noticed that Fil was pouting off by himself. His attitude is improving daily.



WEANING (APRIL 2015)

When you have calves, you eventually have to go through “weaning”. Well, I suppose you don’t HAVE to, but if you are selling a calf and it is moving to a different farm (like Vickie is)... you have to.

So, after doing research... the hubby spent the better part of several days setting up adjacent strip grazing sections that are separated by a 6-strand polywire fence (4-live wires and 2-ground wires: low and at nose level). There are several divisions along that fence so they can stay side by side (separated) for several days. We are hoping that this process will take the lower of the projected time frame... which can be three to ten days.



As you can see in the photo, there is only the wire fence between the separated groups. So they can stand right next to each other and I have even seen Button touch nose with Fil (carefully avoiding the wires).

I have said it before and I will say it again. I have beginner’s luck. Combine that with the hubby’s electric fence skills and the result is: Cattle moved and separated into 2 groups. Mommas and 2 steers on one side of the fence and the calves, bull and other steer on the other side. Took only a few minutes once we were ready. (We also can credit this to moving the cattle every day, they know the drill.) The first weaning has begun.

It is rather noisy because the cows want a calf to relieve them of milk and the calves can’t get to them.

This is Nike hollering.

Button seems to be doing better than Nike. My theory for this is (and if someone corrects me, I’ll be sure to post it) that Button is a pretty well laid back Mom. She keeps an eye on Fil but isn’t overprotective of him. So she is used to Fil being away from her for long periods of time. Her discomfort appears to be all that milk in her udder.



Nike, on the other hand, is a VERY protective Mom. She likes to know exactly where Vickie is at all times and keeps her very close at hand. Usually, when we have heard a cow hollering in the pasture, it has been Nike calling to Vickie. Vickie does go off with Fil, but not for very long. So Nike is definitely in MUCH more distress than Button. She is not only going through the milk issue, but the separation anxiety as well. Poor Vickie is just as distressed as her Momma. Imagine being yelled at for something you have no control over.

As I write this it is evening and everyone is calming down a bit. Even Nike has eaten some grass and is laying down to ruminate. OOPS, I spoke to soon, LOL. I hear some bawling and see someone standing, looking at the calves and Vickie has moved close to the fence. As I said before, it’s rather noisy around here. Heavy Sigh.

You may be wondering how we got them moved so quickly... the hubby created an opening in the separation fence between the water troughs AND he created an opening at the end of the alley to get into the other area. He then strung some polywire to create a “gate” that would block or unblock either opening. We figured that the Mommas would be the first in the alley leading to the new areas and we were correct! They were followed by two of the steers and Fernie with the calves and the last steer in the rear.

The hubby was down at the start of the alley and simply watched the Mommas head in, but blocked the calves and steer so there was a large gap between the groups. I encouraged the Mommas into the area with the trees and when one steer started to turn around, used my herding skills to turn him back. As soon as they were in the area with the trees, I blocked that opening with the gate and stood by it to keep the wires taut. I hollered to the hubby and he let the calves and steer into the alley. Fernie thought the grass in the alley was just fine and didn't move when the others raced past him. As they came toward me, I wanted to be sure they could see the wires in their way and called out "WHOA!"... which caused them to jump back. Then they noticed the opening into their area and they turned and went in to start munching on that good grass. Fernie noticed them going in and nonchallantly meandered his way in to join them.

Meanwhile, the hubby was adding the polywire that continued the west line all the way to the permanent fence. After which he continued the separation fence all the way to the permanent fence. He then removed the alley polywire. And VIOLA! All set for weaning.

DOMINO JOINS THE HERD (JULY 2015)

As you may recall, I decided to sell the heifer calf (Vickie).

- I don't want her to get pregnant by her own father (some farmers DO and that is their breeding program decision, no judgement here).
- I am limited by the number of 'animal units' I can have on the farm.
- I want to expand the herd to include another breeding cow.

So, I contacted Worstell Farm (which is where Button and Nike came from) to give him the first opportunity to purchase Vickie. When he told me he was interested, I then "made him an offer he couldn't refuse" (LOL) and proposed that he sell me a bred-heifer in exchange for Vickie. He was happy to accept my offer which included him doing the transport. (I would have had to rent a truck and trailer and he already owns those, it was a win-win proposition.) In case you are wondering, yes, additional cash did change hands because a bred-heifer has greater monetary value than a heifer calf.

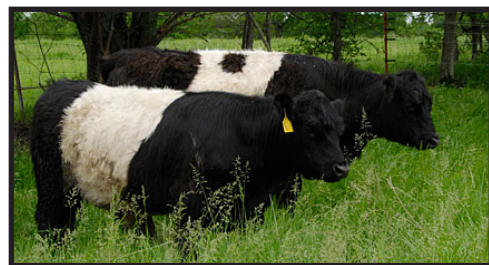
The exchange was made about a week after the weaning was completed. Our neighbor/mentor graciously loaned us the temporary corral panels again and we set it up the same way we did for the vet visit over by the weaning area and added an adjacent section of polywired grass where Domino could get acquainted with the herd before joining them.

These photos are from May 2015. Meet Domino! She turned two (2) this month and is due any time now. When the vet did the pregnancy check just a few weeks before she came to live here, her weight was 530 lbs. She has the same father as Button and Nike which makes them all half-sisters.

And here is the reason she is called Domino. She has a full belt except for that black dot just to the right of her spine. The name was given to her by Worstell Farm and we are happy to keep it.



This steer was determined to get in the photos of Domino. Nice contrast of size from a yearling steer to a 2-year old heifer.



The herd accepted Domino immediately -- didn't have to leave them separated for more than an hour or two. Of course, the 'pecking' order had to be worked out and Button and Nike made it very clear that Domino was at the low end of the scale which Domino did not mind in the least. We often see her hanging out with Fernie.

Since the sire of Domino's calf-to-be is NOT Fernie, I will be happy if it is a girl because that would give us another cow (eventually) to breed to him.

However, I will appreciate bull calves from all three so I won't have to go looking for someone else's steers to cowpool. Crossing fingers and toes on that one.

If I have the estimates correct... Domino is due late July/early August, Button is due late August, and Nike sometime in September. Now, we didn't see the breedings this time, so the due dates are iffy and figured from when Fernie stopped being interested in each lady.

STEERS GO TO BE PROCESSED (JULY 2015)

I was not as happy with the steers that I bought for this processing as I was with our first steer (in 2014)... they seemed small to both the hubby and myself from the beginning and while they did gain and grow substantially, they were still smaller than I would have liked when it came time to process. Since the appointment is made several months in advance, I could either take them in as scheduled or set up a new appointment for the Fall. Since I advertised to the Cowpool Shareholders that they would get your meat by early July, I decided to keep the original appointment even though it might mean a smaller amount of meat.

Once again, the hubby and I very fortunate when it came to loading the steers and taking them to Paradise Meat Locker for processing. The hubby did a super job setting up the polywire to create an alley into the temporary pen and then back to their next pasture section. (I get a little credit there since I helped set up, LOL.)

We moved the cattle into the temporary pen at bedtime so they would be right where we needed them to be first thing Friday morning (June 12th).

First into the separating gate was Button (the lead cow... weren't we lucky!), so we opened the side panel and off she went back to her pasture. Next into the gate was one of the steers so we opened the trailer door and in he went (we closed it behind him). Not surprisingly, his buddy was next in the gate and so we opened the trailer door and in he went with his buddy. After they were secure, we opened the side panel and the gates and it took very little time to encourage everyone left to leave the temporary pen and go find Button.

Then the hubby just had to close off the pasture section, make sure the electric was set up and working and off we went.

At Paradise, the steers walked calmly out of the trailer and with a bit of encouragement made their way into the facility. No problem.

I got the call the following week with the hanging weights of the steers. As expected, they did not meet the 700 lb live weight estimate... coming in at 635 lbs and 580 lbs.

Since there were not enough shares sold in 2015 to include the third (3) steer, I decided to let him grow up some more and will send him to processing with Fil in 2016.

NIKE HAS A BOY CALF (AUGUST 2015)

The hubby went out to do cattle chores yesterday (August 3) and found a CALF! Nike is a new momma! It is a boy calf so he will get a food-type name. I'm thinking.... Chuck.

Here are photos of the newly born boy calf. He had his first meal just before these photos.



These photos are at around 5:00 pm. The pond is just to the left, behind Nike. She was very carefully keeping the calf away from it.

FYI, the pond is rather shallow and it is full of green algae. The cattle enjoy standing in it but are choosing to drink from the trough of water that is nearby rather than drink the pond water.... smart, aren't they!

This is the image I posted to Facebook. Momma Nike and baby boy. We are estimating the calf weighs in the 60 to 75 lb. area. There is NO way we are going to try to remove him from Nike to get an accurate weight.



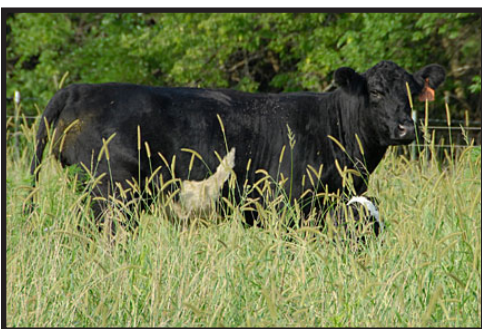
He has had a meal and been thoroughly licked.

The hubby did not find any afterbirth, so we are assuming that Nike had time to clean that up as well.

Many cattle ranchers don't like to have calves this time of year because of the flies.

As you can see in this and many of the other photos on this day, there are LOTS of black flies. We have discovered that this has drawn in lots of birds! The birds swoop in and pick them off of the cattle, but since we were there, the birds stayed away.

We have a diluted solution of Basic H that the hubby sprays on the cattle when the flies get too bad and also on the calves.



Nike has gotten tired of us being so near her new calf and has walked him up the hill away from us and the other cattle.

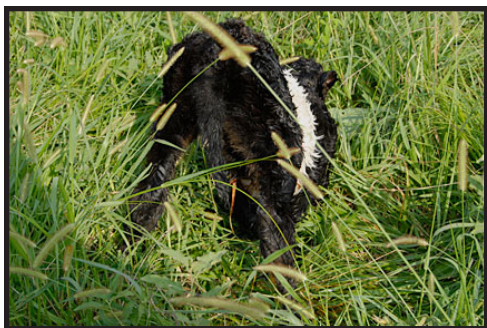
The hubby needed her to leave the calf when it lay down so he went and opened the next section of pasture.

Nike is watching the others make their way into the fresh grass.

Shortly, she headed off to join the others and this gave the hubby the chance to check out the little guy and dip his umbilical cord into an iodine solution.

Do you see the hoof up above the hubby's hand? At this age those are very soft and the coloring is very light.





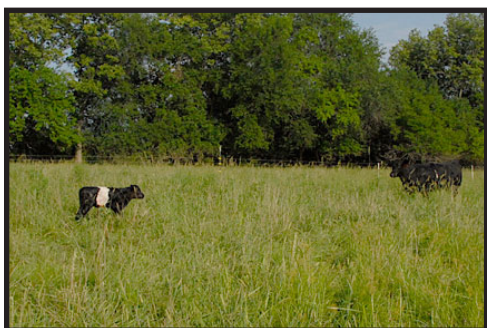
The calf had thought it was going to nap, but after the 'man-handling' decided to get up and find Nike.

This is the proverbial 'butt-shot', LOL. You can see the umbilical cord with the iodine on it.

His tail is covering his boyhoodness (is that a word? LOL).

Once the calf stood up, the hubby was able to spray him thoroughly with the Basic H dilution to help defend him from those nasty flies.

Having been bitten by those little nasties -- I can tell you it hurts!



Good thing the hubby is quick, because it was no time at all before she was heading back to protect her calf.

He waited for her to come to him.



She may not like the Basic H smell, but she wasn't upset by it either.

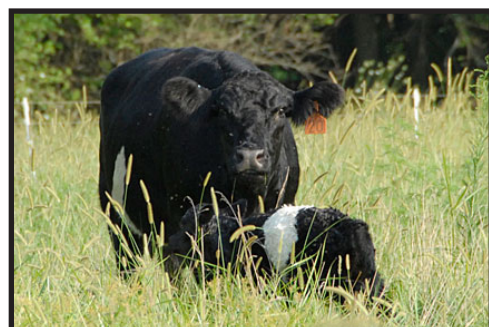
You can see she is torn between joining the others and getting the good tidbits of grass or staying with her calf.

He really wanted a nap at this point and while he could walk, he was having a little trouble figuring out how to turn.

So cute to watch.

This is what a protective cow looks like. When you see this face, do NOT attempt to get near to the calf.

Make sure you always keep the calf between yourself and the momma cow.





I thought I would also include photos of the rest of the herd so you can see what they look like in August of 2015.

This is Button. She should be due any time now.

You can just see one of her teats is engorged with milk which a sign of an impending delivery because her milk has come in.

This is Fillet Mignon (Fil). He was born in August 2014 so he is soon to be one year old.



Here comes Fernie. He looks more bull-impressive every year.

And you can just tell that he is rather excited today. That happens when a cow is/has giving/given birth. Must be a hormone thing.

The lovely Domino. Her milk has also come in so she may be giving birth soon as well.

It would be very nice to have all three calves born close together.



Bringing up the rear is KC Strip (nicknamed Wooly - because he carries SO MUCH HAIR).

As I write this update, I can see out the window onto the pasture where the cattle are. The calf has decided it's time to nap and is not responding to Nike's attempts to move it into the shade by the pond. So she has walked into the shade and is standing where she can see it.

Suddenly a movement caught my eye and I saw Nike, Button and Fernie raising over to where the calf is laying. And as they arrived (with Button, Fil and Wooly hot on their tails) a VERY LARGE BIRD swooped over that area of pasture and took off. OH NO! Did an eagle or turkey vulture get the calf?? Out I went, grabbing my hat and walnut walking staff on the way. (Soon followed by the hubby since he is working from home today.)

Everyone of those cattle were standing in the pasture near the calf and Nike was directly over it. Thankfully, there is a wire run close to that spot so I was able to get on the opposite side to make observation without worrying about the cattle defending against my presence (most, it's just Fernie that worries me).

As I got close I could see the white belt moving... the calf was breathing (first sigh of relief). I hollered back at the hubby and started talking to the cows. I also saw a turkey vulture hovering overhead. Soon the hubby arrived and the calf was disturbed from his nap by my talking and lifted his head... both eyes intact (second sigh of relief). Nike cooed at him and licked him and it was clear that the calf was fine.

After standing there for a while just watching, a few of the cattle meandered away to eat more grass. The hubby went back to his work and I finally decided to head back to this update. From my window I see that Nike has left the calf to go to the pond.

Once again, Nike races to the calf with somebody backing her up and away the bird flies. This time I can see they are seeing it before it can get to the calf and it hasn't had a chance to get near it.

A third time! This is just Nike and the bird has landed on the roof of the nearby barn. The rest of the cattle have left the pond and are heading to Nike and the calf. The calf is UP! It has moved to Nike's side. It appears that the entire herd is going to guard Nike and the calf until that bird leaves.

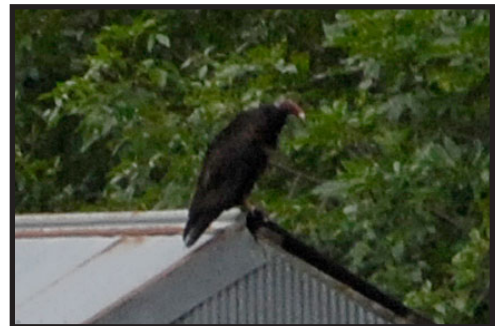


Unfortunately, I can't get a GOOD photo because it is too far away for even my lovely telephoto lens. See the dark thing at the peak of the barn at the very closest edge? I suspect it is a turkey vulture.

I decided to go down with the camera and take a chance that it might leave before I could get there.

Yep, it is a turkey vulture. It is odd for a carrion bird to attack a living creature. There is plenty of food in the form of snakes, rodents, rabbits, road kill, etc.

And we found the reason for it being here.



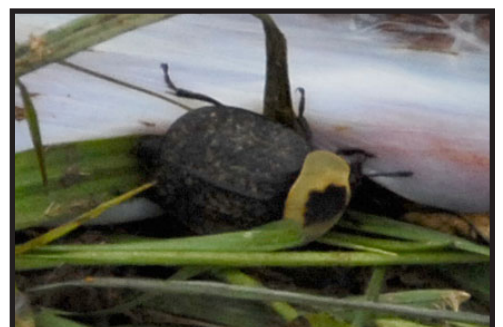
The photo at left is the afterbirth. Turns out Nike did NOT clean up after herself after all. Normally, the momma eats this to get rid of it; and she DID last year.

This was about 25 feet away from where the calf was laying. Obviously, the vulture was trying to do it's job and there was simply miscommunication/conflict of interest here. LOL

The hubby got a bucket and a fork and transported the afterbirth to the far end of the pasture so that there would be no more conflict.

The photo at left is an American Carrion Beetle. It's job is to dispose of dead meat (to put it simply) as well. There is too much for this little beetle, it needs the assistance of the turkey vulture (and the other carrion critters out there).

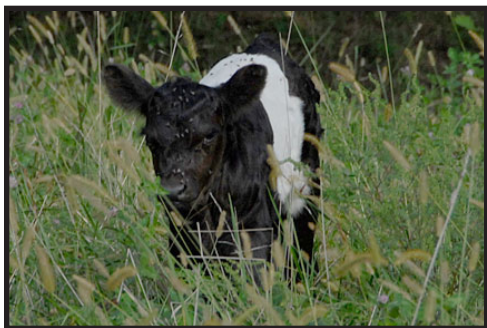
Nature is so amazing and so GOOD at taking care of all aspects of the cycle of life. We humans need to stop interfering, get out of the way, and just be thankful.



MORE CALVES! (DECEMBER 2015)

It's actually March of 2016 as I write this. Wow, where does the time go? I certainly hope my memory is up to filling in the gaps between Nike's calving and the end of 2015.

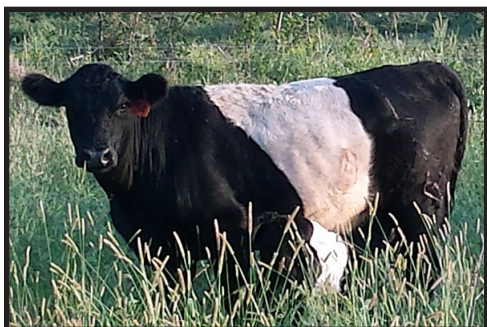
Meet Frank... he was born to Domino on September 7, 2015.



The hubby had been working from home as much as possible to be here when the ladies calved. Of course, Domino picked the day that he HAD to go into the office.

I went out to open the next section of pasture and realized that Domino had her calf. She was laying a long way away from everyone else with a little bundle next to her. Since Domino was a new Momma, I didn't know how she would react to me being close, so I watched from the other side of the polywire until I saw the little thing move. Hurray, it's alive!

There was no afterbirth nearby. The hubby found it later in the day about 400 yards south of where I found the calf. They had travelled a long way soon after birth.



That morning is etched into my brain because I went into full panic mode when Domino left that little calf to go into the shade with the rest of the herd.

She is not bonded to me like the other cows and not only paid no attention to me but would not respond to me getting close to her calf and calling out to her.

She didn't even react when I tried to pick the calf up. It was sound asleep or worse and I could not move it to the shade alone.



I called my cow mentors and both told me that so long as the calf had suckled it's first meal, it would be fine for a couple of hours. Trouble was I did not know if it had for the first time. If not, that calf could be a goner.

They both agreed that if by noon I hadn't seen Domino go back and the calf suckle, that I should get it into the shade somehow -- even if it meant putting an umbrella over it.

Luckily, I did not have to do that. The hubby was able to come home and picked up the calf to carry it over to Domino. Upon seeing that calf, Domino perked right up and realized it belong to her! I truly think she forgot she had it.



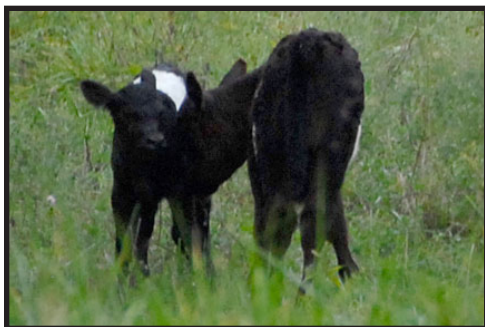
I did my sucking noises and Domino stood while Frank had a meal. My relief was palpable.

They have been quite a pair ever since. The most photogenic of all the cows! LOL

And, yes, I did use some Basic H on Frank to help keep the flies away. The hubby was able to dip Frank's umbilical cord into the iodine solution.

This tree did a lovely job of providing shade large enough for everyone to be together. You can see Chuck (the official name of Nike's bull calf) out on the left; but can you also see Frank?

Frank is the little black spot with two (2) tiny bits of white at the top laying directly below the tree and the black cow closest to Chuck.



It's not a very good photo (too far away and moving calves), but here is Frank on the left with Chuck on the right.



This is Frank nursing. I wasn't sure if I had posted any up close pictures of the calves nursing... they are difficult to get without seeing other unpleasant things. LOL



And finally, meet Dannon. This is Button's heifer calf born on September 14, 2015.



The hubby was out of town for this birth and I was not comfortable trying to attend to the umbilical cord without anyone to keep the cows from charging me. The flies were also not bad that day and she didn't need any Basic H right away.

It took us several days to determine with certainty that this calf was a female. Calves are really tough to catch after that first day -- they are FAST!

For those of you who wonder how we figured it out -- it has to do with pee-ing. With boys it comes out from the belly area, on girls it comes out from under the tail.

As you can see, this calf does NOT have a full belt. Instead there is a white patch on her left side that looks like a hand print -- or the profile of duck. And viola! Dannon is named for the mallard friend on "Jakers!" of Fernie and Pigley. (You may remember that my bull is named after Fernie.)



Thought you might like to see what Chuck is looking like at this point. It's amazing what a couple of weeks does... they grow so quickly!

One thing I find interesting about all these cows and calves is how each cow interacts with her own calf and then with the other calves.

I am surprised to see Nike much less anxious about where Chuck is. This is such a change from last year with Vicky. At first I attributed it to being a 2nd time Momma. The other calves don't hang out much with Nike.

Domino is quietly attached to Frank. Very little bellowing for him because he never seems to be very far away from her. I have taken to calling Domino "Aunt Domino" because she is the resident calf-sitter. All the calves love to hang out with Aunt Domino and Nike and Button seem to be perfectly fine with that situation. Domino only lets Frank nurse from her.

Button, at first, was extremely protective of Dannon; which is quite a change from last year. And after realizing these changes in both Nike and Button, it occurred to me that the difference could be the sex of their respective calves. Generally, however, Button is much less anxious about Dannon than Nike ever was about Vicky.

The calves have surprised me a bit. I assumed that Chuck and Frank would bond -- being boys and older -- but no; Frank and Dannon are almost always together and Chuck prefers to hang out with the two steers: Filet and Steak.

THE CATTLE ARE GOING, THE CATTLE ARE STAYING, THE CATTLE ARE GOING, THE CATTLE ARE STAYING! (DECEMBER 2015)

If you have been following along, you'll know I had intended to get out of animals on the farm completely. I'm including here the write up and photos I took of the cattle in an effort to sell them. This is the most comprehensive description of my cattle that I have done. You'll see that I provided a value for each animal... it was what I thought of as where price negotiation would start with me asking for what I hoped I could make and then having to come down. I obviously scared everyone off because the few people I did talk with thought that was my bottom price. Live and learn. Thankfully, I was not able to sell them and I am so glad! I enjoy having them here. And, also very thankfully, one of our neighbors has generously volunteered to cow-sit from time to time so I can travel with the hubby (translation: take a vacation!).

BELTED GALLOWAY CATTLE – A STARTER HERD

Information from my Beltie mentor at Worstell Farm:

"Your cattle are all very docile, and not easily excited. If the people who are interested are first-time cattle owners, then maybe you want to tell them that you can hand-feed them or scratch their heads or flanks. We don't have anything that you couldn't simply walk across the pasture and not worry. (You CANNOT say that about most any other breed - particularly when you talk about bulls.)

On that bull - **emphasize that the Beltie breed is able to service a herd for 10 years or more. I just read yesterday that they can live as old as 18 years.** Angus bulls are only good for 3 years, then you sell them and buy another. The guy who built our house - and got three of our heifers as part of it - bought his Beltie bull at 5 years old and has had him several years.

The other point of buying a Beltie bull, as we did, was to improve the genetics of your herd and bring the overall carcass size down while you also get genetically-tender beef, with better taste (as long as you keep them grassfed.) University studies echo some ranchers who say that if you bring down your average weight by 100lbs., you can get another 20% more cattle on your acreage. Meanwhile, those slightly smaller-weight calves bring more at the market - so your profits go up.

Beltie bulls are also great for first-time heifers, since they throw a small calf that grows fast. Beltie heifers make great mothers and will still throw a small calve to a larger bull (but who in their right mind would want to do that?!?) Your bull will be able to service a full-size cow.

You can see why they have the reputation for being the most efficient breed at meat production. Stocky and short-legged. Angus are taller and you lose a lot of weight in those long, thin legs.

Our own heifers/cows keep getting calmer and calmer.

You may want to talk about the breed itself. Galloways (as you know) are great first-herd animals. They are very easy to deal with, and survive well in both summer and winter due to that hair coat they have. You got a great deal in that we spend a lot of time working with these heifers to get them used to people. Since you've been working with them (and they had their calves) they settle down quite a bit. Also, while you have pretty uniform pastures, Belties eat a much wider variety of forage than most breeds (only Highland cattle, and maybe Longhorns) eat a wider variety. Generally, the harsher environment the breed started out from is how well they'll adapt to any scene they encounter.

If I were starting up, I'd scoop up the whole set from you, as it's a perfect starter herd."

Here's what I found about Belted Galloway Cattle on the internet:

(www.cattle-exchange.com)

Origin of Breed

The Belted Galloway's first recorded history indicates that they developed during the 16th century in the former Galloway district of Scotland, although references to "sheeted" cattle have occurred in art and literature as early as the 11th century. The Belted Galloway is essentially the same in origin and characteristics as the Galloway except the distinctive white belt that is thought to have been introduced by an infusion of Dutch Belted blood, probably in the 17th or 18th century. They are often referred to as "Belties," and have been recorded in herd books since 1852.

Physical Description

The Belted Galloway is a very distinctive with its white belt that encircles the body. The rest of the body is black, dun or red in color. The distinctive white belt often varies somewhat in width and regularity but usually covers most of the body from the shoulders to the hooks. Belted Galloways are naturally polled cattle. Belties do not develop much fat under their hides; instead they have a double coat of hair consisting of a dense, soft, short undercoat and a long, shaggy overcoat, which is usually cast in hot weather. This double coat provides excellent protection in cold, wet and windy weather. The Belted Galloway cow has about 4,000 hairs per square inch making their coat resistant to severe cold conditions.

In general, the mature Belted Galloway bull weighs within the 1,800 to 2,000 lb. The mature Beltie cow averages 1,100 to 1,300 lb. At birth, bull calves usually weigh 70 to 80 lb. while heifer calves about 10 lb. less.

Defining Characteristics

The breed is known for their grazing ability, longevity (17-20 years) and hardiness.

Belted Galloways have excellent calving ease, feed efficiency, and great marketability to consumers.

Belted Galloway carcasses have a total fat content of about 2%, a low percentage. Data collected in the U.S. has shown that the beef dresses out at 60 - 62% of live weight making it a profitable breed. Their meat contains only 1% saturated fat, which is fitting for health conscious consumers. Their meat can also be marketed in a variety of specialty niches, such as organic and grass-fed beef.

(www.beltie.org/guidelines-for-selecting.php)

Other Desirable Breed Characteristics

Disposition/Behavior: Belted Galloways should be of a calm and quiet disposition. They should not exhibit panic when approached, which can be determined by ears perking, excessively alert eyes, and constant defecation. They should not exhibit aggressive behavior toward humans, even when penned.

Maternal Characteristics: Cows should calve easily without assistance. They should exhibit immediate care of the newborn calf, and neither abandon nor surrender the calf. Protection of the calf in moderation is desirable, excessive protectiveness is helpful when cattle are in the “wild” but not within confined arrangement, as it may be dangerous. Cows should rebreed 90 days after calving.

Milk Production: Cows should produce sufficient milk for rapid development of calf. Udder and teats should appear symmetrical and healthy during lactation.

Foraging Characteristics: Cattle should feed aggressively on available pasture and utilize not only grass but also appropriate non-grass species when available.

Meatiness: Cows should produce offspring with finished carcass weights of 60-62% of their live weights. Carcass weights should be Choice or better.

Hardiness: Cattle should require minimal health care throughout life, be resistant to parasites and be able to “survive” on limited nutrients. They should adapt to environments of marked heat or cold with minimal stress, weight loss, or interruption of reproduction. They should remain active and vigorous well into their teens.



Fernie is NOT registered but is a pure-blooded Belted Galloway (of unknown pedigree) Bull. I purchased him from Blackwater Bend Farm in 2013. His date of birth is estimated to be June 2012. He was weaned in October 2012. As of this Spring (2015) his weight was estimated at 1500 lbs (+/-).

I have not done any tests for semen counts. He has successfully bred both of my cows to produce calves in 2014 (August: bull calf and September: heifer calf) and 2015 (August: bull calf and September: heifer calf).

He is a pleasant member of the herd in that he is not overly pushy to the cows and will play some with the calves. He has not been pushy with me or my husband, but we respect him as a bull. Three of the four calves he has produced have full belts.



Beltie bulls can live to be as old as 18 years and breed even full size cows for 10 years (or more); because of this and Fernie being a virile, young bull from a closed herd, trained to Management Intensive Grazing (also known as Strip Grazing or Mob Grazing), ***I estimate his value to be \$2,500.*** (Using information from various cattle sales sites and the MO NW Region sales figures from the first week of September 2015.)

FYI: As you can see, I keep Fernie with the rest of the herd. Because of this and having calves, I have been using a 3-heights polywire set-up (of which you can see 2 lines in these photos).

Button (the lead cow) is half Brahma/Angus and half Belted Galloway. She is all black with a small white spot on her left side. I purchased her from Worstell Farm in 2013. Her date of birth is March 26, 2012. She was vaccinated for Brucellosis before we purchased her. I have not weighed her but estimate her weight to be 1000 lbs.

She was bred the first time at 20 months of age by Fernie and delivered a bull calf (black with a full white belt) on August 20, 2014 (estimated birth weight 50+ lbs, unassisted birth, cleaned up).

She was bred the second time 3.5 months after the first birth by Fernie and delivered a heifer calf (black with a white patch on its left side that looks like a hand print) on September 14, 2015 (estimated birth weight 50+ lbs, unassisted birth, cleaned up).

Button is very friendly. She is a good mother and not overly domineering of her calf. She was trained to Management Intensive Grazing (also known as Strip Grazing or Mob Grazing) before she came to me. **I estimate her cow/calf pair value to be \$2,500.** (Using information from various cattle sales sites and the MO NW Region sales figures from the first week of September 2015.)



Button - BEFORE calving



Button - AFTER calving



Nike with her bull calf.



Nike from the other side.

Nike is half Brahma/Angus and half Belted Galloway. She is all black with a partial belt across her stomach that tapers up her right side about half-way (it resembles the “swish” of the Nike brand... thus her name) and she has a small patch of white on her left side. I purchased her from Worstell Farm in 2013. Her date of birth is April 10, 2012. She was vaccinated for Brucellosis before we purchased her. I have not weighed her but estimate her weight to be 1000 lbs.

She was bred the first time at 20 months of age by Fernie and delivered a heifer calf (black with a full white belt) on September 24, 2014 (estimated birth weight 50+ lbs, unassisted birth).

She was bred the second time 1 month after the first birth by Fernie and delivered a bull calf (black with a full white belt) on August 4, 2015 (estimated birth weight 50+ lbs, unassisted birth).

Nike is a good mother and wanted her first calf always close at hand, but has relaxed some with the second calf. She was trained to Management Intensive Grazing (also known as Strip Grazing or Mob Grazing) before she came to me. **I estimate her cow/calf pair value to be \$2,500.** (Using information from various cattle sales sites and the MO NW Region sales figures from the first week of September 2015.)

Domino is a half Angus and half Belted Galloway. She is black with a full white belt that has a small black spot near the top of her back on the right side. I purchased her from Worstell Farm in 2015. Her date of birth is July 13, 2013. She was vaccinated for Brucellosis before we purchased her. She was weighed on a scale just before coming to my farm and weighed 532 lbs in April 2015.

She was bred the first time at 17 months of age by Gene Autry (registered) and delivered a bull calf (black with a full white belt) on September 5, 2015 (estimated birth weight 50+ lbs, unassisted birth, cleaned up).

Domino (being the new cow in the herd) has been somewhat reserved and mostly is bonded to Fernie (the bull). Since having her calf, her standing has risen and she is more comfortable with the cows. The calves like to hang out with her, but she only nurses her own calf. She appears to be not overly domineering of her calf. She was trained to Management Intensive Grazing (also known as Strip Grazing or Mob Grazing) before she came to me. I estimate her cow/calf pair value to be \$2,500. (Using information from various cattle sales sites and the MO NW Region sales figures from the first week of September 2015.)



Domino



Domino with her bull calf.



Filet Mignon is the 2014 calf of Fernie and Button, which makes him three-quarters Belted Galloway and one-quarter Brahma/Angus. He is black with a full white belt. He was castrated and vaccinated in March 2015 and weaned in April 2015. The vet estimated his weight in March to be 400 lbs.

Fil will be processed in June 2016.

Steak is NOT registered but is a pure-blooded Belted Galloway (of unknown pedigree). He is black with a full white belt. I purchased him from Legacy Ranch in June 2014. His date of birth is estimated to be January 2014. He was weaned and castrated before I picked him up in June 2014. As of this June 2015 I estimate his weight to have been 650 lbs. (Two other steers from the same herd/age had hanging weights in June 2015 of 348 lbs and 381 lbs, smaller than I would have liked.)

I held Steak back to be processed in June 2016.



CATTLE LOVING THOSE PUMPKINS! (DECEMBER 2015)

I just love this picture of the entire herd enjoying their pumpkins. Can I name them all, you ask? Hmm, can't see any ear tags. Let me give it a try. From left to right:

Frank, Steak (Wooly), Chuck, Domino (furthest away), Dannon (closest), Filet, Nike, Fernie, and Button (it may just be her tail end, but she's there, LOL).



A close up of Miss Dannon. She is a joy! She definitely has Button's calm demeanor.

I have decided to keep Miss Dannon and we are starting to train her to come for treats and be touched. Keeping her to breed will be a bit complicated since I don't want Fernie breeding his daughter. I have some time to figure out how to get around this.

She is a bit bigger than Frank even though she is a week younger. I suppose it is the Brahma in her.

By the way, did I ever tell you that if she had been a boy, her name would have been Furter?

That way the 2015 crop of steers would have been named Chuck Frank 'n Furter. (rim shot) Ah well, have to settle for Chuck Franks.