

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE FARMING : ADVENTURES IN CATTLE, VOL. 4

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.

WINTER 2017

For the 2017/2018 Winter, we opted to divide the hay bales into two (2) groupings. We thought this would make it easier on us for some reason... not having the long alley with multiple opportunities for calves to get through the wire, posts no longer needed but having to be left in the frozen ground getting damaged by rough-housing and being used for scratching posts.

We discovered that getting small square straw bales to set in the depressions between the big round bales helps to make a tent and shed the snow better. Then I use the straw bales to create raised beds (straw-bale gardening) which the hubby surrounds with lumber to create permanent raised beds that we fill with lovely soil and humus.

What we learned from the previous configuration was that three (3) bales across was NOT enough room for everyone to eat at the same time. Pushing and shoving for primary location (which just depended on where the "good" hay was in a given bale) caused damage to the t-posts and wiring. Four (4) bales across worked great for our little herd.

We put the hay in the West pasture. (Too much hunting going on east of us... makes me nervous.) Each group was four (4) bales across with the first to be used north of the winter water trough being two (2) rows deep and the second (pictured here) to the south being three (3) rows deep.

This time we learned that the two (2) groupings just caused there to be waste hay and manure in two big piles. The problems we experienced all boiled down to the number of bales across... not the depth of the alley.

The photo on the right is the north area when the cattle finished those bales. There was a low spot here but not any more. We ended up with two (2) lovely compost areas. Lots of worms and lovely humus for growing things.





Since we stopped raising poultry, this area directly south of the house became available for grazing. In the Spring, the hubby divided it into 4 areas so the cattle would move through it quickly without overgrazing... which is a concise description of management intensive grazing.

This image below shows the difference in the pastures before, during and after the cattle have been through it in the Spring. Because the grass is growing fast during this season, we can rotate them through multiple times without any detriment to the soil. In fact, it helps the soil because the cattle “water” and “fertilize” as they go along.



In case it isn't obvious... the upper left grass is where they had been (lighter in color and shorter grass), the foreground is where they have just been moved to, and the upper right is where they will be going next (green and still somewhat short but will be nice and deep by the time they get there).

You may be wondering about the brown patches of plants. That is red sedge which grows in poor soil conditions. We anticipate seeing less of it in coming years as the cattle do their job.

VET VISIT

The annual visit from our local veterinarian occurred April 17th. There were three (3) calves to be vaccinated and ear tagged, one (1) was a bull calf to be banded (castrated) and two (2) were heifer calves needed their brucellosis shots and “bling”. The appointment was for mid-day which gave us time to get the herd into the portable cattle panel corral ahead of his arrival. We set up the corral and chute around the tree so the herd would have some shade while they waited.



They also did a great job on the grass in that space!

Close up (at right) of the nice shady area featuring the heifer calves (so photogenic!): Aggie and Juno.



This set up works really well for the vet visit. We were originally going to build our house just east of that tree and had some gravel spread in a big circle driveway around it. It is all overgrown now but it makes for a nice surface for the vet to drive over and get set up even when it's been wet.



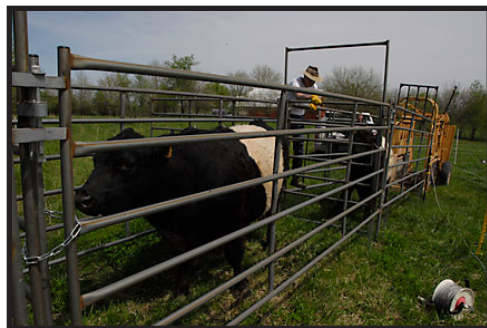


The hubby removes the electric wire for the vet to back up to our chute with their headgate.

This year we made everybody exit through the headgate. Which is why, in the next photo, you see a cow waiting (facing the camera) in the area between the two (2) gates of the corral.

A quick shot to show you the headgate is “open” to entice the calf to walk toward the opening.

As soon as the calf is in position, the vet closes the headgate.



This does not hurt the animal at all. Their necks are substantially narrower than both their heads and their shoulders so by “cinching” it, the animal is secure and cannot go forward or backward until it is opened.

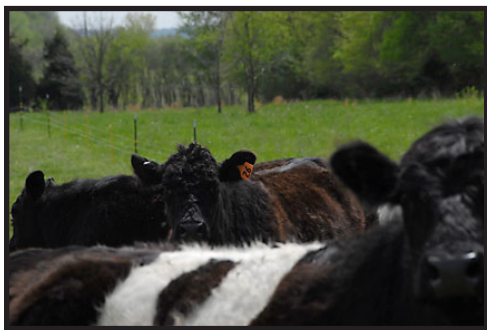
The back gate is then closed to secure the animal (minimize kicking) and the vet can manipulate openings on either side to work on whatever parts of the animal require it while protecting himself.



Here is Aggie with her new “bling”. Girls get their ear tag in their left ear so we can tell from a distance that they are female.

This is a close up of Primo’s new ear tag... in his right ear.

The only exception to this rule is Fernie... since he is not a steer (future meat), he gets a left ear tag like the girls.



This year, we had to give Nike a new ear tag because her old one disappeared. I think she just wanted to sport a new number like the calves, LOL.

The cattle hung out close to the “action” to keep an eye on each other (and me, it appears, LOL).

After everyone is done and happy that the hubby is leading them to the next area of the rotation.

You can see they have already been on the area they are walking through.

We tend to walk on the other side of the wires because the cattle do get excited and wouldn't intentionally run us down, but better to be safe than sorry.



WEANING

Nothing much to say about this year's weaning. The hubby set up the same area as last year (east pasture south half) and we started it on May 7th (a Sunday). Thankfully, the cattle being SO used to being moved from place to place, we didn't even need to use the portable corral to separate them. The hubby simply made a "gate" using the electric wire (with it turned off) and the Mommas and one steer went into one area and Fernie, the calves and the other steer in the adjacent area (separated by a 5-strand fence, alternating 3 live wires and 2 grounded). No fuss, no muss. Each day a new area opened on either side of that divider and so the herd could continue to work through the pasture right next to each other.

The adults are getting used to this and the hollering was loud the second day when the Mommas' milk sacks were the most uncomfortable, but they seemed happy to be "on vacation" and letting Fernie "watch the kids".

The beauty of this setup is that everyone can see each other and even stand close to each other so the separation anxiety that most weanings produce is lessened.

After a week, everyone seemed comfortable with the situation and were reunited at the end of the pasture (the best grass on the farm!). A successful weaning.

SELLING HEIFERS

I'm sure I've said this before, but rather than send you to an old page to find it, I'll just repeat myself.

We like knowing where our steers come from and that is why we keep cows and bull and let them do what they do best: breed. So it's a 50-50 chance that the resulting calves will be males (it's also 50-50 that they will be females... funny how that works, eh? LOL). The calves born in 2016 resulted in one male (Primo) -- who was castrated in 2017 to be a steer and would be processed in 2018 -- and two (2) females (Juno and Aggie).

Some farmers line breed (breed the daughters back to the father) and that is their prerogative. We are not those farmers. Even though it happens in the wild all the time, it just seems icky to me. So, we would have to separate the daughters from the bull and find a different bull to breed them to OR remove them from our farm entirely by selling them. That was an easy decision when we only had a single heifer born in a year. The timing of removing them is important... you definitely want them away from the bull before they become mature and "interesting" to that bull. Since our cows tend to calve between June and October and we wean in the late Spring, it is best to find a new home as soon as possible after that.

To date we had been able to work out a trade situation with our mentor from whom we purchased our cows, but this year he had more heifers than he needed and just enough steers for his customers so was not interested in our heifers. And so I knew that after they were vetted and weaned, I needed to start looking for new homes.

I took pictures of Juno and Aggie before the vet arrived (which explains why they don't have ear tags) to include in the advertisements I placed. Below are the photos I used in the ads. (They grow up so fast!)

This is Aggie (left) and Juno (right) together. Juno is about 7 weeks older than Aggie.



Such a pretty face Juno had!

The vet estimated Juno to be 500 pounds at vaccination and in "good condition".

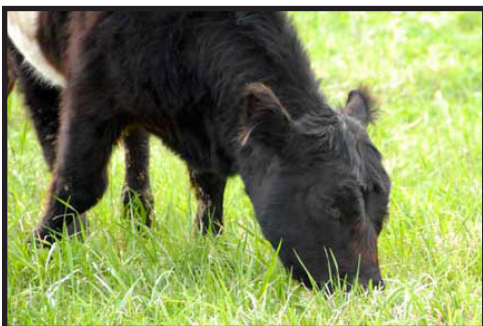
Showing her partial belt from the right side.



Showing her partial belt from the left side.

Aggie had a full belt, so I didn't bother with both sides.

The vet estimated Aggie to be 450 pounds at vaccination and in "good condition" also.



I just couldn't get Aggie to look at me for a face photo. So this had to do.

I first advertised to the farmers who are part of the Kansas City Food Circle and also to the Growing Growers program hoping to place them with sustainable farming folk. I priced them so it was a better deal to buy both of them together since they were bonded to each other. There was interest from a member of that group, but when that fell through I advertised on Craigslist. Happily, the folks that decided to buy them wanted to keep them together and so they now live on a little farm near Warrensburg. Yes, I do check in with the owner from time to time because to me those cows are family.

PROCESSING EXCITEMENT

I try to get a processing date for our steers as close to the Summer Solstice as possible because we have to drive 1.5 hours to our preferred processing plant and we have to arrive by 7:30 a.m. That means we have to get the steers into the portable corral either the evening before or first thing in the morning. So the earlier the sun rises the better because the cattle are more likely to be up and ready to move to fresh pasture.

Unfortunately, I could only get a processing date of May 19 in 2017. What a difference a month makes when it comes to sunrise. There was a storm forecast for the night before, and we didn't want to chance a lightning strike since the corral was set up under a tree (but NOT the same place we set up for the vet).

Farming is not the place where you expect to find or even desire to find excitement. Unfortunately, we had some excitement when we were getting the steers loaded for processing. I don't really enjoy reliving the experience, so please accept this very short version of the story: Once upon a time we had a routine for loading the steers into the stock trailer. The routine was not followed this year and -- lo and behold -- after 2 hours of herding cattle and re-herding cattle, we ended up with the steers NOT in the stock trailer and missed our appointment with Paradise Meats. *

Since there is high demand for processing appointments, the rescheduled date was August 25th. I had to apologize to the owners of the Cowpooling Shares in those steers since the meat would not be ready until September instead of June. The silver lining was that it gave other people time to purchase the remaining shares in the 2nd beef steer. And, because I am who I am, I gave a deep discount to those Share owners on the Retail Beef in my freezer because they were counting on getting their beef in July.

Thankfully, there was no excitement that August day when we loaded the two (2) steers for the trip to the processing plant. All went smoothly and those extra couple of months of grass put a chunk more weight on those steers! Alls well that ends well, as they say.

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*Okay, I'm sure some one is saying: OH COME ON! Tell us what happened so we don't make the same mistakes! Luckily for that person, it's a year and a half since that processing date was missed and the sting has lessened somewhat. So here is what happened and anyone else can just skip this part...

The hubby and I don't always work well together. As can happen with any two people who have different views on things, we don't always agree on how things should be done. I thought we had settled on a successful routine for herding the cattle into the portable corral and loading the trailer so I did not think anything of him wanting to set it up without my assistance. The hubby likes to try different things. Fine, just be sure there is an alley to funnel the herd into the corral, I said. (Picturing the same alley we had used for the vet when I said it.)

Come to find out, lots of things were different. I'm not sure if the words I use here will give you a full picture of the scene I beheld... but I'll try. The "alley" to funnel into the corral was a narrow opening

from the pasture located midway (like a hallway whose opening is in the center of the wall of a warehouse) in a straight line past the portable corral (on the right)... it did not funnel down from the large area and so getting them to find that small open spot was very difficult and when they missed it they had a big area to run around in and we had to start herding them all over again. (Remember, it was just the hubby and I, we didn't have cattle dogs or anything.)

Once they were IN that alley, there was a sharp right turn to make to get into the corral with the straight part of the alley continuing on to the pasture where everyone but the steers would end up. In theory, we could separate them outside of the corral by letting everyone except the steers go directly into the other pasture. (This was not effective because once one of the cows was in the new field, none of the others want to turn away from it and if they did they ran back the way they had come.) FYI, this difficulty with separating cattle is the entire reason we HAVE the portable corral.

The truck and trailer were situated at the far end of the corral... heading AWAY from the pasture holding the rest of the cattle. This is a nice thought since it makes it easier to get the truck and trailer out of the field after loading because there are no wires to be restrung (if everything works correctly). But it also means any cow getting into that area is not contained (except by the external, permanent fencing).

Add to this that we had two (2) steers to load into a basic livestock trailer (one space, not partitionable). We eventually got the first one into the trailer, but he was standing by the door looking past the corral at the pasture beyond with the rest of the herd. SO, when we finally got the other steer in the holding area of the corral to load into the trailer, the FIRST steer bolted OUT of the trailer as soon as the door was opened. It then proceeded to push open the side panel (which for some reason had not been chained to the trailer) and into the open (unwired) pasture by the truck. We got the second steer into the trailer and herded the first steer back to the corral where he simply went UNDER the same panel and escaped again. That steer was so frazzled by this point, there was no way we were going to get him back into that corral a third time.

What normally takes us about 30 to 45 minutes had gone well past 2 hours. It was 7:30 a.m. and we were nowhere near being able to leave needless to say that we should already have been there to unload. Sometimes you just have to cut your losses and as soon as someone was there to answer a phone, I rescheduled our date and offered to pay a penalty for missing ours (they were nice and did not require that).

So, what's the lesson to be learned here? When something works, stick with it until it doesn't!

What had been working (and continues to work still) is this:

- Herding the cattle to the corral is best done with a space that gradually gets smaller with no sudden turns until they find themselves inside the corral.
- The truck needs to be facing the pasture where the rest of the cattle are separated into so that when the loaded steer is looking for the herd, it is closest to the truck not near the back door of the trailer. AND, ideally, use a partitionable trailer so you can secure multiple steers away from the opening door.
- The corral panels need to be secured (chained) to the trailer so that a cow cannot push them out of the way to escape AND cannot push them up off the ground to go under them.
- An electric wire needs to be around the truck and trailer so that (heaven forbid) the animal to be loaded DOES escape, the area it ends up in is designed to funnel BACK to the corral and not into a big open field.
- Get a processing date with the most amount of daylight between sunrise and the time to leave.

By the way, this all happened about a month before we sold the heifers and so we had the chance to readjust the setup (where it was) to work properly. The frazzled steer was given the opportunity to go into that corral and be separated from the heifers with the rest of the herd without causing mayhem. All went well. Didn't mean I wasn't nervous about the August separation and loading in prep for the trip to processing.

Oh, and did I mention that we RENT a truck AND trailer for this once a year venture? Yep, still had to pay those bills. And we would need a truck and trailer for August which the hubby promised to take care of, and yes, he did. One of our farmer friends has a rig that we had used before and was free when we needed it in August and he was kind enough to help the hubby out of the dog house by letting us use it again.

NIKE'S BRISKET

The first calf of the year was born on June 25, 2017 to Nike.

We had the cattle just south of the house again and found out pretty quickly that we had a new addition.

Of course, you can't really tell that from the picture at left. Wow, those calves hide themselves well!



Nike is really good at redirection, too. You'd think that calf was in front of her, wouldn't you? Nope. Nada. Un-uh.

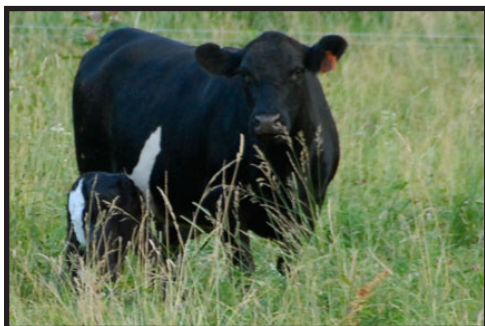
He, yep, it was a bull calf, was off behind her somewhere. Good thing we know this trick, LOL.



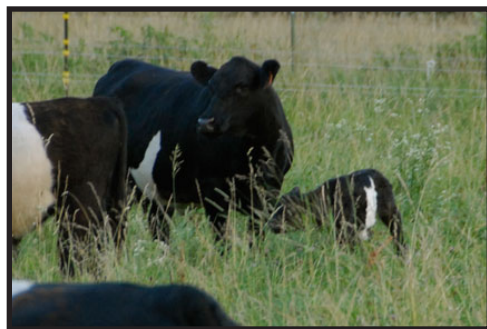
Since we didn't have but the one steer last year, we already had a couple of food names in mind.

Meet Nike's Brisket.

Only a partial belt but that's no big deal for us.

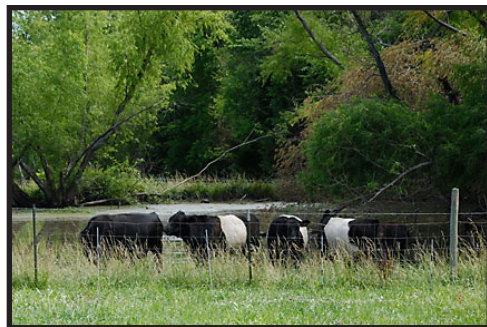


Not sure I've ever captured a photo of Nike nursing her calf before. It was a sweet moment.



We had the gate open between the pasture south of the house and the area around the pond.

Pretty smart of Nike to keep her calf away from the pond. And really smart of the rest of the herd to keep away from Nike the first day, LOL.



DOMINO'S PIZZA

The second calf of the year was born on August 14, 2017 to Domino... a bull calf.

She is such a loving Momma.

Perhaps we had TOO MUCH time to think of names and so here is Domino's Pizza.



Besides being too good to pass up of a name, Pizza has a full belt with a black dot just like Domino, except it is on his left side just over his backbone.

And, that dot (from above) looks like a heart.

SUMMER AND FALL 2017

Summer is our busiest time... that is to say, there are things that must be done every day and then there are bursts of high levels of activity for extended periods. The cattle get moved through the pasture day by day following the rotational plans (with modification for unforeseen situations) that have been pre-planned... this is why it is called "management intensive grazing", their water and minerals are kept filled.

Autumn on the farm...The cattle are still moved through the pasture day by day, water and minerals kept filled.

This year we are eagerly awaiting birth of Button's calf... will it be a boy and throw out the "every other year" record of male to female calves? Because, as I've mentioned before, it's a coin toss chance of male or female. So far our cows have each alternated between male and female. It is a puzzlement.

BUTTON'S BLOSSOM

Drum roll, please!

It's a girl!

The alternating gender streak is still on!



Presenting Button's Blossom, born October 18, 2017 with a partial belt.

PUMPKIN TIME! AND WINTER HAY

There is nothing like a pumpkin! All those hedge apples laying right under their feet and they aren't touching them.

Nope, they are waiting. Impatiently waiting...

For their Autumn treat: Pumpkins! Squash! Gourds! (Whatever you call them things, LOL.)



Thankfully, we were able to glean a couple trailer loads so while their pastures are fine and we don't "need" the extra feed, it does help save a bit of cash so we don't have to start them on hay until late December.

The 2017/2018 hay was delivered soon after these photos were taken and placed just beyond the electric fence in this photo. One grouping of 20 big round bales, four (4) across and five (5) deep. Once again, we put straw bales on top of the big round bales to "tent" the tarp. Worked really well.



A couple more photos of cows eating pumpkins... just because.



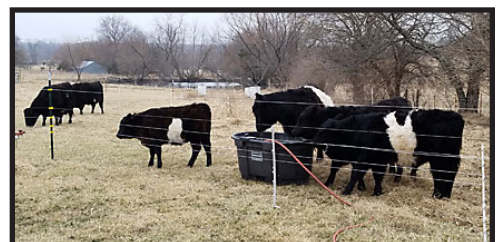
This is the first batch, so the calves really don't get it yet. But they will!



SPRING 2018

We didn't have much in the way of snow during the winter. This is what the grass looks like in March after a dry winter.

Wish I'd paid more attention to the almanac predictions.



The cattle were getting frisky and it is so much fun to watch them frolick and then get down to the business of finding the new grass among the stockpiled, cured grasses (in the pasture just south of the house).

No pictures of the vet visit (May 9) this year... I figure you get the jist of what happens by now. Three (3) calves vaccinated and ear tagged, the bull calves banded, the heifer calf got the brucellosis shot and “bling”. All the calves are in the appropriate weight range for their ages and in good condition.

Everything went smoothly. The hubby set up the portable panel corral (same as last year) around a shade tree with a water trough and an alley from the grass segment they were on. Nike and the calves made their way in first and the hubby just shut the corral behind them. (Oh, sure! it works when you aren't pressed for time and don't have to be somewhere, LOL.)

We didn't have to mess with Fernie or the other cows so they were given access to the pond and seemed quite happy to let Nike “babysit”. LOL

Of course, the calves each complained while they were in the headgate and that brought the mommas running. Especially when Blossom (last one through) yelled and the neighbor's cows decided they needed to yell encouragement. Oy vey! I was stationed at the end of the alley from the headgate to the grass segment where we had a line of wire as a “gate”. Thank goodness those cows are trained about the wire! Button recognized me as a friend, but her calf was yelling and the neighbor cows were yelling and all I could think of was how stupid do you have to be to be standing between momma and her calf. No worries though. As soon as they opened the headgate, I was out of the way with the line and Blossom raced to her momma and all was well.



We also discovered that Nike's front right teat is no longer producing milk. No infections or problems, just done. The vet didn't think there was anything to worry about.



One last picture of Blossom before she went off to live in her new home. Once again, we traded her to our cow mentor but this time for a steer of the same age.

By the way, our cow mentor was VERY impressed with the condition of our herd. He has been to the farm about once a year and commented how much improved the pastures are and how fat and sassy the cattle look.

He was especially impressed with Fernie, so (don't want to jinx it) we may have a home for Fernie if we ever end up with those three (3) at a time heifer calves we are always wondering about.



And now there is Tenderloin (the little guy laying off the right). He's a bit scrawny (proof of just how great our grass is compared to how it is where our mentor lives) but he'll catch up with the rest very quickly.

Close up of Tenderloin (#19). The hubby keep saying “Hey, 19!” (like the Steely Dan song).

This is the sweetest steer. Our mentor gentles all his cattle. Tenderloin loves to be scratched and isn’t afraid at all.



The rest of the herd adopted him the same day he arrived. Plenty of grass for everyone!

2018 has been a WEIRD year weather wise.

The cattle searched out shade even in the Spring but they were all happy because even though it was a REALLY HOT AND DRY year, we always provide them access to shade and make sure they have plenty of water.

We don’t rely on the stock ponds providing drinking water, we use a trough year round (insulated and heated in the winter) which we fill with rural water.



This is unusual, most of the cattle people we know rely solely on water they don’t have to pump or pay for. So having to pay for water is an additional expense of the drought for them.

It’s a good thing we have lots of shade along our fence lines.

Here is Pizza, hasn’t he grown up!

Behind him is Domino looking for all the world like she is going to calve any minute. Look at that udder!

Nothing like a belly full of grass in the evening and laying around chewing your cud.



June 1, 2018 - I am SO grateful and happy to tell you that Prime Rib (our 2018 beef steer, also known as "Primo") loaded easily, unloaded at Paradise Meats and PUT HIMSELF into his stall, LOL. We happened to be the first drop off and he was HAPPY to be out of the trailer. The hubby did a great job setting up the portable corral and running alleys to and from it; which created a good atmosphere and efficient way to separate the cattle.

By the way, I finally was able to enter the American Royal Steak Competition, Grass Fed/Finished Division in 2018. The three (3) boneless, 1-inch thick ribeyes had to be delivered frozen the middle of July and came from Primo. More about that later.

DOMINO'S CALF



Because we don't keep Fernie away from his Mommas, we never know which cow will be the first to calve.

But Domino had been showing all the signs early in June and finally delivered her calf on the Summer Solstice (June 21).

We decided this little bundle with it's full belt would be Summer Sausage if a boy, and just Summer, if a girl.



And.... it's a girl! The rare situation where Momma let the hubby close enough to check on her birth day and even got a photo to prove her gender. Thanks, Domino!



As usual, each Momma keeps her calf away from the herd for most of the first day so they can bond.



Does Pizza look jealous? LOL



Soon the calf is allowed to meet the herd (with Momma's supervision, of course).

Everyone gets a chance to say HELLO.



NIKE'S CALF

By now, if you are a regular reader, you get how much we enjoy picking out names for the animals. So, it won't surprise you that we decided on a theme for the heifer calves this year once we fell into the name for Domino's calf (Summer).

Being "Firefly" fans, we decided to stick with female actress or character names for any other heifer calves born this year.

Therefore, when Nike gave birth on July 9, 2018 to a heifer calf that is RED with a full white belt, we named her "Saffron".

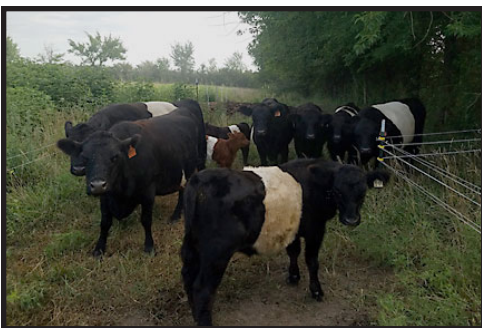
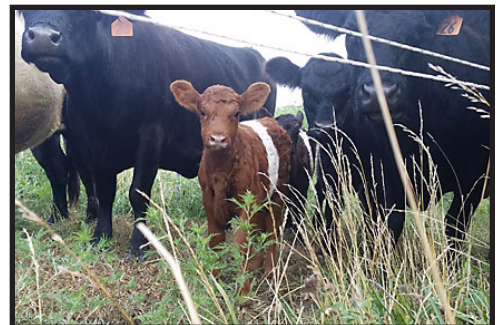
Red is an accepted color in Belted Galloways. It is considered a recessive gene color (like blue eyes), so we were thrilled to find out that both Nike and Fernie carry that recessive gene.



Somehow Saffron made it to the WRONG side of the permanent fence in her search for a hiding spot.

This wasn't far from the opening between the two (2) pastures (which is barred using electric wire instead of a metal gate) so it was pretty easy for the hubby to "push" her to the opening and back to Nike.

Of course, Nike wasn't pleased until her baby was right next to her. She is a very protective Momma.



As usual, it didn't take long before the calves were surrounded by the rest of the herd.

I guess Nike has gotten comfortable enough to let us take photos of her nursing.

This is a great example of how a calf's head and neck have to be angled while nursing. The milk is directed to the appropriate stomach because of this angle.



SUMMER MAKES A BREAK FOR IT!

OY VEY, I really don't like EXCITEMENT on the farm! But that's what we got on July 23, 2018:

I had taken a few days to travel to see my Mom (read all about it on the Blog: Aging and Death). The hubby and I decided to eat out on my first night back. We arrived home from dinner to the sound of frantic mooing. Multiple cows.

Gary investigated while I changed into farm clothes. Domino's calf (Summer) was on the wrong side of our fence (the PERMANENT fence) in our neighbor to the south's pasture. How did she get there?

Called the neighbor to let him know we might have to cut through the fence. If so, no worries... We'll repair it.

I headed out with the bolt cutters. Domino (AND Fernie) came to meet me and she bellowed all the way walking behind me to the fence (in the east pasture).

Gary cut the south fence on the west pasture side so the rest of the cattle would not have access to the break. He then "pushed" Summer to the break while I "pushed" Domino in the same direction. This is because the calf would only move toward her momma's voice.

Summer found the break and started running along the fence between the west and east pastures to the north. The entire herd raced north with her and she met them at the water trough (after slipping under the electric wire). Mother and daughter reunion! Domino licked her as she nursed.

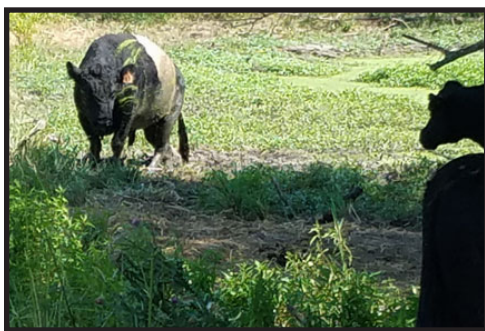
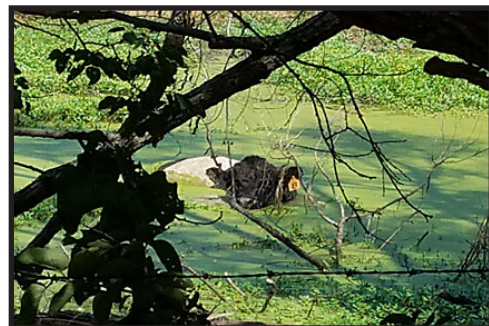
Peace restored. 1 hour from the moment we arrived home. Gratitude!

FERNIE KEEPS COOL

It's a Frog! It's a Log! NO!

It's a Bull trying to stay cool in the algae covered stock pond.

Anyone who has studied the best ways to increase sperm count will tell you that keeping those testicles cool is key!



You can see in this photo just how low the pond was by the middle of July. All that green plant matter is usually just water up to that line of brown that you see behind Fernie's back.

The algae really clung to his coat... good thing it lays on top of the water, otherwise Fernie would be ALL GREEN.

Interestingly, none of our other cattle care to spend much time in the pond. Oh sure, they'll wade in for a few minutes, but Fernie is the only one who wants to stand in it for long periods of time (or lay there when it's low - like it was in these photos).

Notice how his belly and legs are caked with mud.

And we can see "how they're hanging" -- I don't have to ask, LOL.



BUTTON'S CALF



The hubby kept telling me that he thought Button was about to calve...in August. I remained skeptical because she had calved in October and that would mean she had been bred by Fernie the very first time she came into estrus.

One of the signs of impending birth is that the cow goes off by herself for privacy (we assume).

And guess what we found the next day...

Button had her calf! (Button is standing to the right of the tree with her calf at her side... looks like she is nursing to me.)

The rest of the herd is politely keeping their distance at this point.

Button has come to trust the hubby so much that he was able to approach the calf a few days after this when it was asleep in its "hiding place".

And... TA DA! The alternating gender streak is ended!



It's a heifer calf (2nd year in a row for Button) and, following the theme for the year, we have named her Kaylee.

This is a VERY playful calf. See how her tail is up and almost in a spiral? She throws the tail up and just wants to run and run.

She entices the other calves to play more than we remember any other calf doing that.

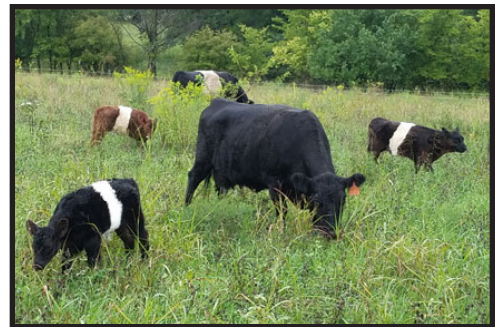
Kaylee is every bit as sweet and fun loving as her namesake.

The hubby captured this pic of all three calves a few days after Kaylee was born.

All three calves have full belts and happily Summer's belt (black calf on the right side of the photo) is very different from Kaylee's belt (black calf on the left forefront) and it's easy to pick out beautiful Saffron!

Interestingly, we have noticed that Saffron is a bit smaller than the other calves even though she was born between them.

Oh yes, and since we have "3 heifers born the same year", I'm going to have to make some really BIG decisions soon.



DROUGHT REPORT (AUGUST)

The farm is going through tough times. While other areas of the USA fight fires and floods, we are dealing with drought.

Because we farm sustainably, our little piece of the earth can withstand a year of drought pretty well. The yard is made up of whatever grows during each season without added water (including bushes and trees). The pastures are the same BUT they are being irrigated and fertilized by each cow as it eats the plant matter, drinks the water from the trough and then urinates/defecates as it moves through the management intensive grazing system.

Add to this that we have more acreage per animal than is required (translation: we are slightly understocked) and we end up with pastures that improve with each rotation. The result of this is that, this year, we will have plenty of grass/forbs/foliage for our cattle to eat until winter in spite of the drought conditions.

Other cattle producers, who aren't doing what we do, have had to start feeding hay in August when they normally don't need to feed hay until November.

The hay season was bad this Spring and there was already less hay to be harvested. Combine the low supply of Spring hay to the early feeding and you get prices for existing hay that is up to 5 times the normal price... if you can find hay at all.

My hay guy has no hay to sell me for the winter. I won't need any until November and so I am in good shape for now... but come November if I have not found hay for my cattle, things are going to be difficult.

Hindsight is 20/20 and I wish I had baled the areas of grass that during the Spring I was mowing for neatness since the livestock can't access them (outside a permanent fence and/or over the septic system). I AM looking into alternative protein sources to supplement whatever plant matter is left in the pastures this winter. Usually our cattle come out of winter as fat and sassy as they went into it, but this year they are likely to lose some weight (as is usual with other cattle). I am working hard at not having to sell off any livestock to get through the drought.

If you pray or put out intentions or the equivalent of those things, please specifically ask for rain in drought stricken areas (so the places that are flooded don't get even more flooded). Thanks.

AUTUMN 2018

Lots to tell you!

AMERICAN ROYAL STEAK COMPETITION: Do you remember me telling you I entered the American Royal Steak Competition? Drum roll please, we came in 5th (out of 15)! Click [here](#) for the official press release of our placement.

You can see the full results on the PDF. My entry number is 330. I am SO pleased! To be only 3 spots down from an award blows my mind. YIPPEE! According to the documentation, PlayHaven Farm LLC was the ONLY Belted Galloway (7/8 with 1/8 Brangus) represented in either the Grass Fed or Grain Fed categories.

FYI, the 2018 Retail Beef is from the steer that the competition steaks came from... so you can taste for yourself why we did so well. :)

WINTER HAY: Well, I finally tracked down some alfalfa hay in small square bales. Alfalfa is a very rich, high nutritional value hay and so we won't be able to just put it out there like we do the big, round bales of mixed grass hay for them to free feed. Not to mention that because everything is SO MUCH

MORE EXPENSIVE this year, I was only able to afford 100 small square bales (because they were \$10.00 per bale, OUCH).

We will have to dole this stuff out each day and the cattle will just have to forage what has been left to cure in the fields for the winter. Granted our pastures are in great shape and we should have plenty of the “tasty” grass until January at least. They’ll eat the good stuff first, and then will have to settle for the stuff they aren’t particularly fond of.

Gratefully, our local cow mentor has a couple of big, round bales of mixed grass hay that he can spare us -- for if we get 15 inches of snow all at once -- to supplement the alfalfa for a short time. What would we do without wonderful neighbor friends?

ANOTHER INTERESTING MORNING STORY (AGH): The hubby was away (September 24, 2018), so the cattle were my responsibility. Yes, we have a different neighbor who comes over to give them water each day, but he comes in the afternoon and so if there is an issue any other time, I’m on my own unless I can get ahold of someone to help.

I let our dog out first thing and heard MOOING. Oh dear. I dressed and headed out with my staff, gloves, boots, etc.

I turned off the electric wire and turned on the water. I also grabbed a couple of the tall, step-in posts in case I needed to get a calf back under the wire to join its momma. It turns out they were all together where they should be but the water troughs were completely dry! The new area of grass must be pretty dry. (Turns out the trough also had a small leak.) All I had to do was fill the troughs... right.



(The photo is NOT from this event, but I’m including it so you can imagine seeing what I was seeing... the intense gaze of a great big bull just on the other side of a few electrified wires.)

The big trough was very slowly filling and Fernie the Bull was not happy and had pushed it into the wires.

So I had to move the trough before it filled up so it would not be discharging the electricity. I used the short extension of hose to spray the cattle (which usually gets them to back up) but Fernie likes that and just stood there, happy. Heavy sigh.

I decided to fill the small trough (that we use because of the calves) first and that was the WRONG decision.

The yearling steers made for it right away and Fernie thinks he should drink first so he “threw his weight around” (literally) and head-butted them. Two (2) of the steers were able to back up, but Tenderloin (#19) got tossed and ended up on MY SIDE of the electric fence. Thankfully, Tenderloin IS VERY TAME and he did not land on me.

First thing I did was make sure the gate that divides the north and south pastures was closed AND chained. Then I moved the hose BACK to the large trough so it would fill while I worked out how to get Tenderloin back with the herd without the herd making for Tenderloin and freedom... did I forget to mention there was NO barrier to keep them from going all the way back into the west pasture from whence they had been moved the previous day?... thanks hubby (sarcasm intended).

I unsuccessfully attempted to get him to go back under the wires between the two (2) troughs (which I’d moved enough for him to do so) – Fernie was still close by the water right there in front of him (and me). In the process, my staff broke. AGH. Did he kick it? Did I just push too hard? No clue. But the only thing broken was a piece of wood, so silver lining there!

I had to be able to open the wire completely and there were cows hovering around the water. AGH AGH AGH. Tenderloin had moved away from me down the alley a bit and was just watching. (Thankfully, just standing there and no longer happy to see me.)

I started by spraying the cows again... most of them moved off a bit. Then I used one half of my staff and brandished it at Fernie while I growled menacingly and stamped my feet hard. He backed off a bit and I kept growling under my breath and projecting my attitude of annoyance and “bigness” as I untied the wires. When I looked up, he and the rest of the herd had backed off about 15 feet. GOOD. (Later I got to thinking that maybe they thought there was a dog hiding somewhere in my vicinity... might have to think about getting a cattle herding dog.)

I became calm (ish) and walked around Tenderloin (as unthreateningly as possible). Then I encouraged him forward and since the whole herd (including the bull) had backed away a bit and he had room to get a good gallop going, he went right between the troughs and into the area with the rest of the herd. SUCCESS. All that was left was to reconnect the wires and finish filling the troughs.

Unfortunately, during this whole episode, I punctured my arm on the barbed wire and had to take a minute to make the wound bleed so as to avoid tetanus (which I followed up with a good cleaning, a dose of anti-biotic ointment and a clean bandage once I was back at the house).

Excitement on the farm is NOT fun. I was sure to check their water every morning and (if I didn't see our neighbor doing it) every evening as well.

GLEANING PUMPKINS: This year it was especially important to find pumpkins for the cattle due to the drought. I started my search while looking for hay and even contacted pumpkin farmers on the other side of the state (no drought there) to find out how much it would cost to order a truck load. Once I was able to purchase the alfalfa hay (see above), I was able to ease up a bit but I still wanted to have an abundance of pumpkins so the grass would last longer.

For some reason, there are more Pumpkin Patch operations in the Kansas City area these days. I went online, found the ones within driving distance and started making phone calls and sending emails. As you can see, pumpkins were achieved!



Our usual source (a local nursery) had me call on 11-1-18 and we scheduled the first of two (2) pick-ups right away. The second pick up was around Thanksgiving. They had the usual orange jack-o-lantern pumpkins in a whole variety of sizes left over; plus some novelty squash and gourds. We usually end up hauling two (2) trailer loads away for them and it came to about the same amount this year.

One of my cold leads turned out to be a fun person to talk with and the place at the furthest point in my limit, so when they didn't have any leftovers, it wasn't a big deal. BUT, they told me about a resource I had not been aware of previously and so thanks to them, the hubby and I were able to get a bunch of pie pumpkins we would not have had. Yes, Virginia, there ARE still nice people!



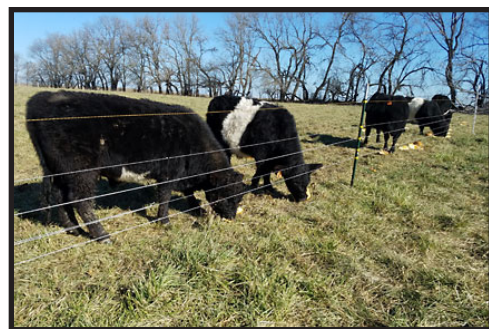
The best of my cold leads turns out also to be the closest resource... a farmer who grows their own pumpkins and they happen to hire one of our beekeeping friends to provide colonies of honeybees to pollinate their squash/pumpkin/gourd fields.



It is nice to have something in common. And it is nice that we were able to help them get the pumpkins etc. out of the field so seeds from this year's crops wouldn't compete with next years crops.

We gleaned two (2) trailer loads initially and then they called a couple weeks later asking if we wanted what Harvesters (a local food pantry non-profit) did not take. YES, PLEASE!

As you can tell from the photos, the cattle really enjoy their autumn treats!



They were loading their dump trailer and since they are so close to us, they just hauled it here and dumped it in the pasture where we wanted the pile. We figure it was at least equivalent to two (2) of our trailer loads.

Plus those squash were for human consumption, so they are very meaty and sweet. The cattle L*O*V*E them!

All in all, we ended up with enough pumpkins to last the entire month of November and (as of this writing on December 2) probably another week. Usually, we run out by Thanksgiving.

MORE PUMPKIN AND OTHER NONSENSE PICS

I found a few more pictures that I just can't help wanting to share...

I saw the hubby from my office window giving the cattle pumpkins.

Finally, a chance to show him tossing the things. The pumpkin is directly in line with his outstretched right arm. It looks like it is stuck to the end of that tree branch, LOL.

The setting sun caused the rosy glow.



The hubby brought out two (2) wheelbarrows full that evening. This was from the first barrow load.

Everyone gets right to it!



See the cattle run after him as he moves down the fence to give them the second barrow load.

Some of the pumpkins are too big to toss in one piece so the hubby uses a machete on them.



Nothing like having a cow say thank you. LOL

Fernie seems to be happy with the pumpkins that the others left behind.

It was a beautiful sunset.



YOGA DEMONSTRATED BY FERNIE THE BULL

If you have ever taken a yoga class, you have probably heard of the “Cow Pose”.

In my chair yoga class, it is followed by the “Cat Pose”.

We have often mused about the origin of the pose names and the Cat Pose is pretty obvious if you have ever watched a cat stretch... arching it's back and lifting it's tail up high... the classic Halloween image of a hissing cat.

The Cow Pose had been more mysterious until I started noticing Fernie stretch after getting up from his nap or ruminating.

I promised my Yoga Teacher I would share the pics if I was able to catch him at it.



Basically this stretch is the opposite from the Cat Pose so that that arch in the back is accentuated by moving your chest forward (your arms are lifting you if on the ground and are holding onto the chair behind you if seated).

Here he is fully stretched and even turning his head to the left to accentuate the stretch on the right side (he turns his head to the right as well).

Not only does he get a good stretch, he gets to show off the “family jewels” to any interested bystanders. ;)