

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE FARMING : CHICKEN ADVENTURES, VOL. 2

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Sustainable Farming : Chicken Adventures, Vol. 2" 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.

MAY DAY (MAY 3, 2013)

Finally, the EggMobile is finished (for info on the construction, [click here](#)); between rain, life and getting the cattle, we were a bit behind getting it done.

I had hoped to move the hens into it and let them get adjusted to life without the Chicken Ark and without the Chicken Tractor ... just the EggMobile. But as I said before, we were behind schedule.

So, on April 28, the hubby used the tractor and moved the EggMobile into position. We then proceeded to put up the two (2) poultry fences that will make up their ranging space from now on AND moved the Chicken Tractor in close proximity because -- DA tada DA! -- the chicks were also due to move out of the brooder into their transitional home (the Chicken Tractor).

Chickens are territorial and establish their society and pecking order among those with whom they grow up. Adding new chickens to that society can be pretty ugly (or so I've read and been told)... the key is to get the original chickens used to the new chickens without them being able to have physical contact. The chicks being in the Chicken Tractor provides a barrier while at the same time allows the Hens a chance to see them and get used to them. (FYI: we will only do this with the pullet chicks because the meat birds won't be in the same fence with the hens.)

Besides which it is time (at 4 weeks of age) for the chicks to get used to grass, wind, rain, the hens and change (while still being protected and sheltered). We put the heat lamp in the Chicken Tractor to use at night and to make sure the temperature doesn't get too cold.



The EggMobile (on the left) and the Chicken Tractor (on the right). Both mobile coops are situated so their open end is to the east since our dominate wind is from the southwest for most of the year.

We decided to add another length of siding to each side of the Chicken Tractor to give more shelter to the chicks... less wind and rain.

We moved the hens first, on Sunday at dusk... they were trying to figure out how to get to the Chicken Ark to go to bed; so we picked up one at a time and put them into the EggMobile. Needless to say, they were pretty freaked out by the whole experience. Poor things.



It took them most of the day Monday to decide it was OK to go back into the EggMobile and lay their eggs. I had to move the Chicken Ark out of sight so they would stop trying to get out of the fence to go to it. Change is not an easy thing for chickens.

They did make their own way into the EggMobile on Monday night.

We only made one ramp, so started off with just one (1) of the two (2) pop-holes open. But with so many nest boxes, I did not want them to stay in the habit of having to take turns inside to lay their eggs. So I opened the second pop-hole and found they both enjoyed hopping up to go in and flying out.



24 nest boxes, no waiting! Mainly because they are still confused about how many hens can be inside the EggMobile at a time during the day; but also because there are only 11 hens.

They do have favorite nests though and insist on using them even when other nests are unoccupied.



The tongue (as predicted) has become an outdoor roost.

And they have come to LOVE the shade under the EggMobile. Lots of room to scratch or lay down in the grass and be out of the sun and/or protected from hawks.

Here is the new feeder (with it's green 'rain-hat'). They quickly figured it out, but they keep forgetting about it in favor of trying to get into the Chicken Tractor where they used to be fed.

The waterer is directly behind the feeder in this photo. I am very happy to have a waterer that I can fill easily. Worth every penny. It holds 3 gallons.



And here you see the pullet chicks hiding in the corner (where the heat lamp is) away from where the sky opened up (when I opened the lid at the other end to take the picture).

The gold colored chicks are Buff Orpingtons. And, if you followed from last year (or visited the page for 2012), you'll recognize the Light Brahma chicks. It's hard to see the Black Australorp chicks in this photo (and the next, for that matter).

The chicks may be freaked out by change, but they are curious critters. That reminds me, we had a pretty easy time moving them... I prepared the Chicken Tractor first (moved some of their used wood flakes so their scent would be inside)... food, water, light, etc. Then the hubby and I caught them one by one and put them into a transport crate (I bought several so we would be ready at processing time.) and carried them outside.

It took them a while to calm down, but in a couple of hours they were as flighty as they had been in the brooder (LOL).



Now this is what I expect to see when someone talks about “free-range chickens”... Don’t You?



And this is what we have only a few days later: May 3rd. Over an inch of accumulated snow (following rain and sleet) overnight from the 2nd to the 3rd. Luckily the air temperature did not get below freezing, so while it is still snowing (as I write this at 2:30 pm on Friday, 5-3-2013), we are not getting any more accumulation and what we got previously is melting.

We left the hens in the EggMobile with their food and water until 9 am today... they were not thrilled, but they did figure out the food and water CAN be inside with them. They still don’t understand why they can’t go into the Chicken Tractor like they did ALL winter.

The forecast is for snow throughout the rest of the night and rain into Sunday ... with the wind shifting from the north/northwest to the east.

We added the tarp to the north and east side of the Chicken Tractor to keep as much wind and rain out as possible. The south side (you see it in the photo of the chicks above) is still open.

Even so, the ground is pretty saturated and I had to add a thick layer of wood shavings for the chicks this morning to get them out of the wet. Thank goodness the electric only flickered a bit and the heat lamp is keeping it nice and warmish inside.

And the next batch of chicks is due the week of the 6th (which, if history repeats, means they will arrive on Saturday the 4th). The brooder is cleaned out and new wood flakes installed, food and water at the ready and hover in place. These will all be cockerells (males) of the Dark Cornish breed... meat birds. They will spend a month in the brooder and then go into the Chicken Tractor (which will have been vacated when we put the pullet chicks in the EggMobile with the Hens).

Once the first batch of Dark Cornish vacate the brooder, we will be ready to receive the second batch of Dark Cornish chicks to inhabit it in June... so they may not spend as much time in it depending on how hot June gets.

You'll know when we know! Check back...

MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION... WELL, SORT OF (MAY 20, 2013)

As I shared under 'Weather' in the Status Update, the EggMobile proved itself in severe weather conditions. YIPPEE!! You never really know if a design will work in real life the way it appears it will on paper. After leaving the pullets in their own fenced space for several days, we put them in the large fenced area with the hens. There was some posturing and chasing, etc. by the hens to make sure those young 'uns know who is boss, but they have pretty well settled into a routine now.

MEAT BIRDS

The first batch of Dark Cornish chicks (our meat birds) are doing very well in spite of spending an extra day in shipping because they missed the window for delivery on Saturday. We were sure we would lose some... they were pretty darn thirsty... but we were lucky and only one did not survive. The Spring temperatures have been unusually high and we have gone from worrying about chicks getting too cold, to chicks getting too hot. I opened all the windows and put in an oscillating, elevated fan to move the air in the brooder and we only turn the heat lamp on when the temps go into the 70s. In another week, we should be able to move them out of the brooder and into their Chicken Tractor (assuming the temps don't head back to the Arctic weather we had the first week of May).

Officially, the deadline for ordering meat chickens has passed... but I did order some extra chicks, and am happy to sell the resulting flavorful, juicy meat birds to you this year. I'll need to have your information and reserve the birds BEFORE we process them, so don't wait!

LAYERS

We were laughing at how we now have Hens and 'Mini-Me' hens... a nod to the Austin Powers movies.



This picture shows the hens chasing the pullets away from the feeder... not to fear, there is another feeder so everyone eats.

The hens are doing a great job teaching the pullets how to get food from the ground.





Of course, there are always some who prefer the easy meal (LOL). That's OK, no judgement (as long as they lay eggs when they come of age).

The young Australorp pullets are hard to see, so I made sure to take a photo of one for you.

Below is what I REALLY mean by "hard to see". Two pictures of all the chickens working in grass eating bugs and plants.

You can see some of the older hens easier in the distance because there is a strip that was mowed for the fence line before we moved the area south a bit.



We are getting six (6) dozen eggs a week now. Come September, we will have LOTS more, get your name on the Egg List so you too can enjoy these wonderful, healthy eggs!

Oh, almost forgot... we have decided to leave the Chicken Tractor in with the EggMobile indefinitely. From our experience last year and paying attention this year, we are discovering that the pullets are too young to 'get' using the roosts for sleeping. They want to 'pile on' in the corner like chicks do. This means they will likely head for the nest boxes in the EggMobile and what is the point of that when the lovely Chicken Tractor works for that purpose.

Also, that hawk attack earlier this year has me a little concerned that the space available with two (2) fences put together is too large for only one (1) structure to use for cover. Now that the Chicken Tractor is open to all during the day, we can adjust the location of the two (2) structures so there is one close by in case everyone needs to go under cover.

This all means that instead of one (1) more structure for the second batch of meat birds, we are making two (2) and need to get at least one done over the Memorial Day weekend, cuz it's just about time to bring out those cockerel chicks. I've made an improved design of the Chicken Tractor and since our birds range outside of it during the day, we have named the new structure: Cockerel Campers. Pictures of construction will be available on the Coop Construction page.

PROCESSING CHICKENS (AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2013)

If you haven't had a chance to read about LAST year's processing, that information is found in Chicken Adventures, Vol. 1. In November last year, we had a group tour the Green Building Project, so Eric Butler was here to explain about healthy, 'green' insulation. He and his wife were processing their chickens the following weekend (140!) so we offered to help as a favor, cuz 1) we like them and wanted to help and 2) it's always good to have a favor to call in (LOL). It was another good experience for us. They rented a local farm's processing room and had a few more people coming to help. It ended up being six (6) of us. I ran the drum plucker, the hubby was on the kill cones and scalding with another fellow. It was a LONG day and in six (6) hours we processed about 90 birds. There were intermittent electrical problems that slowed us down. I also fell on the slippery floor - my fault, wrong shoes - and it turned out I pulled the lateral collateral ligament on my right leg. That's another story. Anyway, that is the lead up to tell you that those experiences taught us how we needed to set up our on-farm processing site.



Here it is, same basic location as last year, but much, MUCH closer together.

That Ash tree provided shade the entire time.

We started before dawn: opened the cockerel camper and moved the chickens from it to the transport crates... five (5) birds per crate (very room for them).

The crates rode on the trailer behind the tractor about 1000 feet from the camper to the processing area.

We unloaded them to sit along the west side of the red barn so they would be in the shade and mostly out of sight of the processing... but close enough to be convenient.



Yes, a couple of the chickens escaped as we opened them to remove the next bird... but they did not run far and we were able to catch them.



This is the kill cone set-up. We thought the bungees across the top would work to keep the chickens from kicking out... we were wrong.

We ended up using baling twine by putting a screw on the back of the board behind each cone and tying the twine to it. Then looping the twine around each bird's legs and securing the end to the screw again.

It worked very well. The twine was not so tight as to hurt the chickens and yet it kept them from kicking themselves out of the cones. These chickens are amazing kickers! One reason we like them for improving the soil!

We discovered that because our variety of chicken has more wing than the Cornish-Cross that is so popular, the turkey fryer as a scalding is just too small for our purpose... Upgrade to a 2-burner propane camp stove (60,000 BTU) and a 60 quart aluminum stock pot. We used the turkey fryer to heat water that we then added to the stock pot as needed. This worked well!! It meant that as the stock pot water cooled off, we had hot enough water waiting so we didn't have to wait for the burner to heat the stock pot water as long.

We are able to put all three (3) chickens in to scald at the same time in that 60 quart stock pot. We used Silicone Quilted Oven Mitts (from Bed Bath and Beyond) because you can actually push your hand into the water and not get scalded yourself.



These 3 images are the new "Whiz-Bang Drum Plucker" that the hubby built. IT WORKS GREAT!

All three (3) chickens go in at once. You spray water from the hose while the drum plucker is on and in about 45 seconds, you have plucked chickens! There are always a few feathers that don't come out, but that is what quality control is for!

I found that small wire cutters work really well for grabbing hold of the feathers that need to be pulled out by hand. You just squeeze them enough to pull, not cut.

Pin feathers on our chickens are dark so you can see them whereas on the white Cornish-Cross you don't see them as well. They can be rubbed off before cooking pretty easily.



The green cooler closest to the camera are filled with cold water to hold the chickens after being plucked and before they are gutted. It is the final step in the 'dirty' area.

Under the Shelter-Logic shed is our 'clean' area. Here is where the butchering is done.

After the chickens are butchered, the blue cube coolers are used to chill the chickens for four (4) hours as required before they go into the refrigerator. We put water and ice in them and they work great!! In the shade on that 90 degree day in August, we had NO problem keeping the water at the almost freezing temp required for the entire time. Let's see, we used about 100 lbs of ice between those 2 days of processing.

Clean up was pretty easy... I filled two (2) spray bottles with 'Sals Suds' and had sprayed everything down ahead of time, then another spray after we finished using each station and the sprayer from the hose loosened the feathers, blood, etc. and washed it all off. Follow that with chlorine from a different spray bottle, a rinse from the hose and left to dry in the sun (the ultimate sanitizer!).

After the chickens had chilled appropriately, we put them on cookie sheets and covered them lightly with parchment (with parchment paper underneath as well) and put them in the refrigerator to 'age' for a day. This allows the muscles to leave the rigor mortis stage and therefore it is tender when you cook it.

24 hours later, the commercial vacuum packer is set up, the bags made, the scale is ready and we do one more quality control inspection of each chicken before vacuum sealing them. We mark on the bag with a Sharpie the weight of the bird and the date it is sealed.

Then it's time to send them to their new owner's home.

See? Not so bad as I thought last year. Between the two of us, we can do 25 chickens in the morning. We start around 7:00 am with the actual processing and (so far) get done around 12:00 pm; with about another 1/2 hour for clean up. As we get more skilled, I'm sure it will go faster. Of course, more hands would cut that time as well.

A ROOSTER IN THE HEN HOUSE??? (NOVEMBER 2013)

Anyone following us on Facebook already knows this, but if you aren't on Facebook... you'll never guess what we found.

A Rooster!! It was a surprise to us. We had noticed that one of the hens was much larger than the rest and suddenly I noticed that the feathers on it's neck and over it's rump, in addition to it's tail feathers, ALL indicate that this chicken is NOT a hen, but is, in fact, a rooster! It is one of the Light Brahma chickens. The odd thing is that recently I was re-reading about chicken breeds and noted that the Light Brahma is supposed to be the most docile of the heritage breed roosters. And I got to thinking I might get one.... viola! he appeared. Now, I don't know if this was always a male and he just matured slowly (unlike the Dark Cornish) or if we have one of those birds that actually changed sex (like some frogs do) to guarantee the continuation of the species.



Either way, he is lovely... he is very calm (might even be hen-pecked) and I have yet to hear him crow. I think 60 hens in his harem might have something to do with all that. :)



I'm including this photo of one of last year's Light Brahma ladies so you can see what a molting chicken can look like. Poor thing... no lady wants her photo taken when having a bad 'feather' day (or week, or month).

She is losing her old feathers here and in a couple of months will have all new feathers and be gorgeous again.

OVERWINTER PASTURE (JANUARY 2014)

This part of the United States gets four seasons and it's possible to do rotational grazing (which is basically what pastured poultry is) most of the year. However, winter snows and frigid temps require special considerations; therefore, we move the chickens to a location close to electricity and the house so we can easily care for them.

If you followed us last winter, you'll know we put them in the front yard and then moved them just outside of the yard to the east pasture in March; and that was fine with less than a dozen hens. Sixty plus hens need LOTS more space than the front yard provides, so I planned to use the March location to overwinter this year. We cut and baled the hay in the space during May and then mowed the grass tall before we moved the EggMobile into it in November.

My plan was to use a ShelterLogic Canopy and adapt it so the EggMobile would be under the center and have 8-ft. wings on either side with sidewalls and adding a HUGE tarp as extra coverage and for the north side. That plan had to be scrapped when we had 50+ mph winds in late November that damaged a couple pieces of the tubing and ripped the covering apart in places. heavy sigh.

Replacement plan: ShelterLogic makes a Garage-in-a-Box product and has added one for SUVs that has the height, length and width I wanted (20 feet long, 13 feet wide, 13 feet high): EUREKA! I ordered it immediately and it arrived the first week of December. They recommend at least three (3) people to put it up, but with the Holiday Season keeping everyone busy, it ended up being just me and the hubby. Thank goodness for the Little Giant ladder and the smarts of the hubby about how to fold the cover so we could place it on the peak and roll it open a bit at a time. We were also blessed with a wind-less day. We added sand to the metal bar that slips through the loop at the bottom of the door covering to weigh it down (as suggested).



NOTE: The key to using a 'temporary structure' like the ShelterLogic is anchoring!! We used 15-inch auger-type 'earth anchors' at every leg not just the corner legs as required by the company. Additionally, we use ratchet tie-down straps attached to concrete deck piers on each interior leg (the strap wrapped around the junction where the leg meets the upper cross member). So far (knocking on wood, here) the ShelterLogic SUV Garage-in-a-Box has withstood the strong winter winds from the NNW as well as the less frequent, but more problematic strong winds from the SSW.

I situated the ShelterLogic to the west of the EggMobile and a bit further to the north so it would provide some shelter from wind and blowing snow. It took the chickens a while to get used to the noises associated with the cover getting hit with wind gusts, but after 2 months, they hardly notice them. I placed nine (9) bales of hay inside along the north end of the structure to block the wind even more from that direction. And I put the short ladder roost (that I took out of the EggMobile, see below) so it leans against the bales, making a nice area to perch inside if they don't want to set on the bales themselves. The feeders are arranged in the open area and we leave the door rolled open about 3 feet.



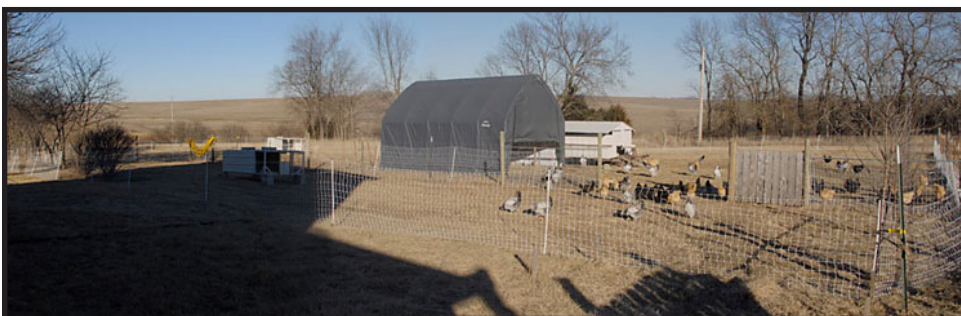
I also bit-the-bullet and bought a special waterer for winter. It is a metal, thermo-stat controlled electric base (comes on when the temp is below 35 degrees F) and you use a metal waterer that sits on top of it. I really like the design of the waterer though. It basically looks like a bucket with a trough that is covered by an inverted bucket. When the inverted piece gets down far enough, it compresses a spring-type piece with rubber on the inside of the inner bucket that otherwise blocks the hole that lets water pass out to the trough. Once the water covers the hole, no air can get inside and a vacuum is created. When the chickens drink out of the trough and uncover the hole, air goes in and water comes out again. Simple and oh so smart.

The only trouble was that the heated waterer needed to be in an enclosed area. So I opened up the EggMobile and removed the short ladder roost. I then shifted the other ladder roosts so that they are up against the north end, leaving 2 feet of free space by the pop-holes. The waterer sits directly between the pop-holes about 6 inches in so the chickens can get all the way around it if they choose. I used an outdoor rated extension cord with a 3-plug end so that, in addition to the waterer, I can plug in a heat lamp when necessary. The extension cord comes out through the pop-hole (the door of which is a bit warped anyway and I can still close the door and latch it) and continues the 100 or so feet to the exterior electric box on the house. I also added one of the feeders in that space (to the right of the waterer, up against the nest boxes on the east) in case I had to keep them closed in longer than overnight.

For additional perches, we moved the Chicken Tractor and both Cockerel Campers into the fenced area... spaced a distance from the EggMobile so that they can also be used by the chickens to avoid flying predators. We put each structure up on blocks at the corners so the chickens can dash underneath from every direction. The hens like them very much -- someplace to get away to.



The area/set-up from the south.



From the southwest (that's the shadow from the house).

The area/set-up from the northwest.



I used three (3) of the 164 ft. long poultry net fences to encircle the large area and another inside the side portion of the front yard. Originally, I used just two (2) on the large area, using the field fences of the back yard and front yard as the remaining sides. However, some the hens figured out how to hop up high enough to get through the larger openings of the field fences; which meant adding the poultry fencing also along those sides. We electrify that fence when there is no snow. The fence inside the front yard we don't electrify... which is nice because this way I don't get shocked going into the chicken yard considering you have to go over it to unhook the electric battery/inverter.

You might wonder why (with as large as the pasture is) we added the side portion of the front yard. Well, it's like this. I was holding that area back during November so the hens would have a fresh area to investigate in December, but they were so intrigued by the grass on the other side of the fence, that they figured out how to get into the front yard... we didn't ever figure out if they discovered the five (5) feet of field fence that didn't get covered with the poultry net fence, or if they just flew to the top of the wood gate and hopped down the other side. Once I put up the fence in the front yard, they were satisfied. It's not that they want the entire front yard, they just wanted to be able to get to that stretch with the lilac bushes and the redbud trees. Thank you very much. I've debated whether to open the entire front yard to them now that it's January... I'm sure they would find something to entertain or entice them... but I'm leaning toward not because I like my porch free of chicken poo. We'll see. Below are a some photos I thought you might enjoy.



The chickens associate me with food. Go figure. So whenever I stick my head out the door or walk outside, they come running to the closes point where I appear to be coming into their pasture.

Here I was out taking photographs of the set-up (the ones above this) and they followed me all the way around... until they decided I wasn't bringing them anything, that is. LOL

The hubby took this one morning when as I was feeding the chickens their cracked navy beans (roasted). I've discussed the navy beans elsewhere on the site. Beans are high in protein in addition to carbohydrates (for energy)... they make a good supplement during a time when natural meat sources like mice, reptiles, etc. are not available. I grind flax seeds and mix that into the beans because the chickens refuse to eat the flax seeds whole. Tricky, eh? They really enjoy getting the beans.



I alternate beans with Japanese Beetles that I trapped over the summer and have kept frozen in the freezer for this particular purpose. There's a blog entry about it and a bit more info here.



Isn't our rooster looking handsome!

Unfortunately, we have some Buff Orpingtons that have figured out if they peck at the Light Brahma's feet they can make them bleed and that provides them with blood as a reward.

I'm about ready to make those Buffs into 'potted chicken'. (Haven't yet, but really thinking about it!)

Anyway, that is why his feet look so bad... lots of scarring and cuts from those nasty Buffs. I keep telling him and the other Light Brahmats that it is OK to peck those Buffs head when they are messing with their feet! A couple of the girls have figured it out, but I guess the rooster is more concerned with being 'friendly', if you get my drift.

The hubby got a few shots of me cleaning out the EggMobile.

As you can see, I open both doors on the north end and that gives me access to all but about the three (3) feet closest to the pop-holes. After I finish with the north end, I close up and go to the south end and open the door on the left (on the right in this picture) and do the same from that end.



I use a rubber broom that I got at a Home Show years ago. It is recycled tire rubber and one side is fingers like a broom while the other side has a squeegee. I use the squeegee side to scrape the poo to the door and into the tug on the ground. (As you see in this photo.)

If no one has asked for chicken poo for their gardens (hint hint), I carry the full tug into the pasture and spread it for the hens.

The hens LOVE to get into it and scratch for bugs or other tidbits and in the process they spread it around the pasture very nicely. There is always at least one chicken watching my work. Often, several come running when I open the doors so they can get inside and start the searching through and scratching before I can take it out.

If they are in the way, I take a small load out into the pasture and spread it ... usually most of those hens that have come inside make a bee-line for it and I'm left to clean in peace.

The plywood floor cleans up very nicely most of the time. During the winter, I have to wait for an above-freezing day to clean, so the poo builds up a bit. As long as I get it cleaned out within a day or two, it doesn't have time to get that nasty ammonia smell AND the hens usually have it churned nicely so it's easier to remove.



Let me tell you, frozen to the plywood poo is tough to remove. I usually bring the hoe with me for those tough piles. When I have to use the hoe, the hens scatter! There must be an instinctual fear of that sharp metal and the scraping sound it makes.



Last, but not least, a snow photo. We've had several bouts of snow... the deepest has been about six (6) inches so far. The chickens dislike snow. You can see that several have figured out how to sun themselves on the lids of the nest boxes. Smart chickens!

This photo also shows a couple of pumpkins. There's info about the pumpkins here. The chickens LOVE the pumpkin! It is very nutritious besides. The hubby brings each frozen pumpkin into the basement to thaw and then cuts them in half and cross cuts them so they look like a flower and lie flat on the ground. The chickens don't eat the seeds, I guess they are too big; but they dig into the meat and will clean it down to the skin over a couple of days.

You might also be able to see a few chickens under the EggMobile. I used a couple bales of hay and put them under the edge on the northwest corner and under the north end. Makes a nice cozy spot. I notice they've got a nice dust bath in there as well.

Almost forgot... with the frigid temps this winter coupled with the winds... I decided to block up the hardware cloth 'window' on the west side. I used black duct tape and made several layers going from the bottom to the top. You can just see it under the eave above the chickens on the nest box lids. It's been very helpful. The east side is still open for ventilation.

BAH-HUMBUG-CHICKEN STYLE (2-12-14)

Oh, the ups and downs of livestock. Winter is a tough time for the chickens. Especially when it snows. It's as if the earth disappears for them. The sky is gray and the ground is white as if they are the same thing: Nothingness. The chickens are not likely to venture into the Nothingness. I am a Goddess, because I walk in the Nothingness and bring them food. LOL.

We shoveled area around the EggMobile and ShelterLogic and shoveled paths to the Cockerel Campers and put hay and haybales around for them to walk on, scratch through, perch on, etc. But, regardless, they don't have the space they did because we just can't shovel the entire pasture. So they are not happy campers.

The big issues are pecking and feather eating. The rooster is definitely hen-pecked now. Most of the beautiful feathers around his neck have been sheared off and the hens continue to peck at his back and feet unmercifully. He puts up with it admirably -- more than I would, for sure! But then, he does want to stay on their good side (if you get my drift). Most of the other Light Brahmas have started pecking at the heads of the chickens that are going after their feet... but not all of them have. Some hide in the EggMobile in a nest... I've seen a pair sharing one nest to protect themselves, poor things.

A week or so ago, I was feeding Japanese Beetles first thing in the morning and saw that one Light Brahma hen had a bright red butt. PANIC. I managed to catch her and called for the hubby's help. Her butt was bright red from having the feathers all plucked out and her skin had been pecked to the point of bleeding. The hubby moved the Chicken Ark into the front yard and I put her in it while I gathered feed, grit, calcium and water. Then I cleaned it out and put fresh pine shavings in it. Later, the hubby put in one side of 3 nests. I had planned to use the Chicken Ark for a hospital, but really hoped we wouldn't need to. Well, I was wrong.

I hung out with the hens that day for longer than usual and discovered a new pecking behaviour. When the rooster would mount a hen, other hens would come running to peck at her vent (the “hole” where everything comes out) to grab the tiny feathers there. Uh oh. Bad habit. I was also on the lookout for any other girls who had butt plucked and pecked issues. The next morning I found one in the EggMobile hiding in a nest. It was a Buff Orpington. I put her with the other hen in the hospital and kept watch on them.

The Light Brahma has continued to do better and better, but sadly, the Buff Orpington died a couple days later. Blessings to her.

I thought about moving the worst of the pecking hens into the Chicken Ark and putting the Light Brahma back with the others... but when we tried that, we simply saw too many trying to peck the Light Brahma. So back she went to the hospital. Later that day I came across another Light Brahma trying to hide in the EggMobile to keep her feet unbloodied. So I quickly shifted her into the hospital... and now I'm thinking that these were the two (2) hens who had been sharing a nest all along. They quickly bonded to each other and I haven't seen any other Light Brahmas sharing a nest hideout.

As you can imagine, I did quite a bit of research trying to figure out what brought all this on and what to do about it. Feather eating is a protein issue ... but these chickens get plenty of and a variety of proteins. I even give them ground rabbit meat once or twice a week. The only thing other than that is irritability... not much I can do about that.

The weather warmed for several days and now has headed back into winter... but at least the snow has melted and the hens can get away from each other. (Crossing fingers and toes here...) Hopefully, that will break the bad habits of winter pecking and plucking.

ANOTHER POLAR VORTEX IN MARCH... IN LIKE A LION (3-31-14)

I cannot express how unpleasant it is to get sub-zero temps in March. Snow is one thing, but I (like everyone else I know) am sick and tired of Arctic weather in Missouri. Having been through this twice already, the hubby and I got everything prepared to deal with it. The chickens water was topped off fresh with supplements, plenty of milo inside the coop and grit and calcium, too; plus the heat lamp, of course.

I decided that the hens in the Chicken Ark hospital needed to go in with everyone else to be sure to have enough warmth. So after dark when we closed up the EggMobile and turned on the heat lamp, the hubby and I shuffled the ladies into the EggMobile through one of the lids to the nest boxes. I fretted for the 36 hours that the chickens were ‘cooped up’ and was so happy to be able to let them out as soon as possible after the temps made it into the 10s.

I opened one door, so I could watch them come out and grab any hens that looked to have problems (and close the pophole if need be). In this way I discovered one of the Light Brahma hens had been BADLY cannabilized. She was not only featherless but skinless as well along her back (I could see the bone) and down the left side toward her leg (I could see intestines). She must have been exposed on that one quarter of her body. I immediately moved her to the hospital ward and honestly did not expect her to survive the day, let alone the night. Another Light Brahma hen had her feathers plucked from her throat above her chest and there was some blood there, so she too went to the hospital ward. The next day when I was cleaning the coop, I found another Light Brahma being ganged up on to get the blood from her bleeding feet and then there were three in the hospital ward.

Are they the same hens that were in the Chicken Ark hospital before? It's possible. The neck pecked hen and the foot pecked hen appear to be the ones that had been sharing a nest box to keep safe... at least I have not seen any other chickens doing that since they moved to the Chicken Ark. The cannabilized hen I THINK is the lowest on the pecking order... she may be the little hen that has

always been seen closest to the fence and always on the run... and I say that because I have not seen any hens in the big group doing that behavior since she was moved to the hospital ward.

I am happy to report that it has now been a month since the March Polar Vortex and even the cannabilized hen is alive and all three are thriving. One of the Black Australorps figured out how to fly over the fence and spent every day with the hospital ward ladies and every night back in the EggMobile.

We moved the Eggmobile out of winter pasture a week ago and those hens have been SO happy to have new ground and cow manure to scratch, bugs to find and grass to nibble. I had planned to move the hospital ward hens in with the others at that time, but was expecting house guests immediately afterward and didn't want to deal with 'issues' at that time. The hens in the hospital ward were VERY confused to find their buddies not across the fence but have settled down this week. Especially when we opened up the area where the first raised bed was built with lots of turned soil and earthworms. LOL

The hubby and I are moving the Eggmobile to fresh pasture tonight and we are putting the three hospital ward hens into the EggMobile after everything is in place. I hope the excitement of fresh ground, manure, bugs, plants, et al keeps the focus away from the newly re-introduced hens. Cross your fingers and toes for me. I'll let you know how it goes.

NEW HOMES ALL AROUND (5-2-14)

OFF THE FARM:

Remember how three (3) Light Brahma were put into the hospital wing after the last Polar Vortex? Well, I have been putting off reintroducing them to the flock... the dynamics of the flock have been pretty good and I was afraid those girls would just get beaten up again. Thank goodness for the KC Food Circle Expo!!

A lovely woman happened to mention to the nice man at the booth next to mine that she had her coop ready but no chickens yet. I spoke up immediately and, viola! the three (3) Light Brahmas have a new home. While I am sad to say good-bye, I am happy they will be staying together and have such a good new home.

I had a chance to check the hen who had been mauled and was DELIGHTED to find that only a small patch on her back shows a lack of skin. Her feathers cover it beautifully and unless you dig to look, you'd never even know she had been attacked. Hurray and Blessings to her and her buddies.

Here are the 3 Light Brahma ladies in their new home. Looks like they are busy cleaning up the place... too busy to pose for any photos anyway! LOL



THE ULTIMATE HOME:

No photos with this one... I'm sad to tell you that we lost three (3) more hens since the last update. I don't know why they died except that according to all the research I did... sometimes chickens just die for no obvious reason. I guess we all have our time to go and theirs came. It was two (2) of the Black Australorps and one (1) Buff Orpington.

NEW TO THE FARM:

On a brighter note, the meatbird chicks are here and in spite of the headache of chicks... they are fun to have around.

If you have been following the page on Facebook, you will have heard the saga... feel free to skip it (LOL). For those of you who haven't... I decided to try a different hatchery that is in Missouri: Cackle Hatchery in Lebanon. I called well in advance of when I would be placing the order to be sure that they could handle a large order of Dark Cornish chicks... I was figuring on 100. They told me that would be fine. I decided I wanted to pick them up so I could see their facilities... no problem there either, just call instead of ordering on-line. SO, as soon as I knew how many I needed I called to place the order: 100 chicks, no problem, would be ready a month later which turned out to be Earth Day.

Two (2) weeks later I get a call late on Thursday afternoon. "Are you coming today? Are you on your way?" they asked. "No, my pick up date is Tuesday, the 24th of April" said I. OOOPS! They had a problem with the number I needed on my pick up date and had the chicks early, but someone forgot to call and tell me. (Strike One.) "Oh, and we only have 94." (Foul Ball.) "But I live 3 hours away and can't get there today before you close and not tomorrow -- prior commitment. What are we going to do?" I asked. Mumbled conversation concluded that they were sorry and it was their fault and I was not to worry. They would hold enough chicks from the Monday hatch to fill the balance from the Wednesday hatch and could I come on the 26th of April instead? I asked if they were sure they could fill the order considering it was only 2 weeks away. Oh yes, they assured me.

Wednesday, the 25th and I get a call late in the day. "I'm sorry, but we only have 55 chicks for the order you are picking up tomorrow." Stunned silence on my end. What the heck am I going to do? Lots of apologizing on the other end, their fault, yada yada yada, but no practical suggestion of fixing the issue. (Strike 2 AND Strike 3). "Perhaps you don't realize that you just put MY relationship with MY customers at risk, since these birds are all pre-ordered" was my comment. So I confirmed I would be there in the morning and they could pretty much assume this would be the end of our business relationship... oh, and I wanted a refund for the number of chicks they were short.

What to do, what to do?? I really didn't want to run two (2) batches, five (5) weeks apart this year. So I swallowed my pride and called McMurray Hatchery in Iowa. Would it be possible to get 50 chicks on the Friday hatch (yes, this Friday)? Yes, was the answer. So I paid for them and hoped they would arrive before the end of postal hours on Saturday (this is what they call a 'pipe dream').

I arrived at Cackle at 9:30 am the next morning (3.5 hour drive one way) and had calmed down. At this point, the same lady I spoke to on the phone offered to ship the balance missing free of charge from the Monday hatch. I was dumbstruck for a moment, couldn't even get out the words: Why did you not offer this solution last night? Finally, I just said that I had resolved the situation already.

She was doing the paperwork, counting the chicks, etc. and in the awkward silence I mentioned that I saw they have turkey poults and how I had considered getting some, but do not feel brave enough yet to try raising turkeys (having recently gotten over my fear of birds). She offered me a couple of turkey poults (that is what they call the chicks of turkeys: poults) to help make up for my trouble. I restated that I had decided NOT to get turkeys, not feeling brave enough. She said they have Heritage breeds... expectant pause. And she would give me Heritage Breeds? She could give me two (2) commercial breeds and one (1) Heritage Breed. I looked at her for a moment contemplating and decided "I guess this means I have to be brave sooner, eh? OK, Fine put in the poults." And that is how I came home with 59 (they had miscounted) Dark Cornish chicks, and three (3) turkey poults: a Broad-bested Bronze, a Broad-bested White and a Blue Slate (which I have since named: Red, White and Blue, in that order.)

The McMurray chicks got stuck at the post office (which is why I didn't want to use them anymore) and I picked them up Monday morning. One (1) died in the box. A chick died the next day (it happens). And then 10 died and I have no idea which batch they were from. And then 10 MORE died! And it turns out that it is a BAD IDEA TO MIX CHICKS FROM DIFFERENT HATCHERIES... having to do with immunities within one group not being compatible with immunities of another group. I had just wasted a whole lot of money, not to mention the trauma of finding dead chicks.

Time for some GOOD news... the turkey poults are great: healthy, inquisitive, etc. It was a good thing we devised a cover for the brooder, because the turkey poults flew up to the top of the hover within a couple days. Pictures of the brooder/hover/cover found with the Coop Construction info.

More GOOD news... we moved the chicks from the brooder to the Chicken Tractor (yes, the big, heavy original) on Memorial Day at 9:30 pm so that it would be dark and the chicks would be asleep. We did this using only a small LED cap light and it was MUCH calmer than past attempts to catch running chicks. LOL

ANYWAY, we counted the chicks as we loaded them into the crates and low and behold: 87 chicks! That is enough to cover the pre-orders I received (although not enough for me to have any for myself... more on that below).



Here is the NEW chick set-up... Hard to see, but there is green, 48-inch plastic chick fence inside the electric. This year I put them directly onto grass and we opened the door the first morning. In past years we moved the mobile coop with the chicks inside... but with 87 chicks, that is TOO many for such a small space other than sleeping.

Now you can see the chick fence. With it so tall, we had to improvise a door. It's at the corner closest to us.

The fencing comes with step in posts, but they are not strong enough or go deep enough for that height; the wind was blowing it over immediately. So we put in T-posts at the corners and used the step in posts as mid-supports. Then a few pig-tails to hold it down in the low spots... chick escape proof.



Food and water both inside and outside the first couple of days. Then water inside and all food outside. Gotta encourage them to leave that safe haven. Can you see the red light in the back corner? That's a heat lamp for the nights under 75 degrees Fahrenheit.



The door is open!

And the reason we used the Chicken Tractor to start is because of the turkeys. This structure works really well for turkeys and will be their official home once the chicks move to the Cockerell Campers.

The turkeys will truly be free-range. This is an experiment for me this year... no turkeys for sale in 2014. If all goes well, next year perhaps.



This is White (Broad-breasted White Turkey - Commercial breed) trying to sleep all safe and secure up on the perch.

I think I embarrassed her, she turned around. LOL And look, a Dark Cornish chick is up on the perch next to her.



You can say what you like about turkeys being stupid, but they are teaching the chicks as much as the chicks are teaching them.



This is Red (Broad-breasted Bronze Turkey - Commercial Breed).

I have no idea yet what sex any of them are. Red has been the most inquisitive from the get go.

And this is Blue (Blue Slate Turkey - Heritage Breed).

This one is more shy. BUT, it has also escaped from BOTH the chick proof fence AND the electric fence more than once. I think that because it grows slower than the commercial breeds, but has great wings already, it must be going over and doesn't know how it did that. Luckily, I check on them throughout the day and Blue goes in readily when it sees a chance. Likes to be with it's buddies.



And they are out! It took awhile... the ritual to investigate that doorway is the same as it was the very first time in 2012 (you can read about that here). LOL

Can you see the cut grass pieces? They gobbled those up the very first day. Thank goodness for grit! They also were transitioned to milo and black-oil sunflower seeds after the 2nd day on pasture.

I'm seeing some feather eating by the Cornish chicks, mainly each other's butt feathers but also the turkeys are letting them clip some of their feathers. I do not like that. Will be separating them as soon as possible. Let's see, they are 5 weeks old in these photos.

A curious thing ... when we were moving the chicks, we discovered one with what looks like a dislocated jaw. Now, we found one like that last year and thought it had run into the wall in the confusion of catching them (one reason we changed our strategy) and decided to cull it rather than have it starve to death. So, when I found THIS one and knew it had not been traumatized, I decided to let it be until I could do some research. Turns out this is a genetic defect called "scissorbeak" or "crossbeak". I'm sure the chick is from McMurray.

As of today, it is still eating and drinking fine, but it's upper beak is curving down like a hook as it grows and who knows what will happen. It may still need to be culled, but it does not seem to be in pain or anything, so it lives.

FREEDOM RANGERS, DARK CORNISH, TURKEYS, EGG LAYERS, OH MY! (7-19-14)

There are A LOT OF POULTRY on the farm these days. Oh my goodness.

FREEDOM RANGERS

I'm experimenting with a hybrid chicken this year: Freedom Rangers. They are said to be a 4-cross hybrid that is healthier than the Cornish Cross and forages more in the pasture.

This photo is a few days before they came out of the brooder. They certainly did grow very quickly in the brooder. WOW. Had to raise the hover up within the first week. That usually doesn't happen for a couple of weeks or more. They also are chow hounds (no wonder they grow fast).



I decided to move them to the pasture sooner than I usually do with the Cornish. First, it's summer and plenty warm outside. I had stopped using the heat lamp a few days before this cuz it was so hot upstairs in the garage. Plus at 3.5 weeks, these birds are really well feathered out. They still don't see very well at this age though, so I was taking a chance giving them pasture access when they might not see a hawk coming their way.



Here is the set-up. Because they are SO much bigger than the Cornish (even at this age), I didn't use the chick fence that we used earlier this year. (It was a real pain, by the way, too tall, will have to re-think how to use it in the future. Glad I didn't need it this time.)

We were so happy with how the move from the brooder went with the Cornish this year, we did the same thing with these chicks: after dark, minimal light, quietly catching each chick. Much less stress on everyone. The count was 59 (started with 61).

Not surprisingly, these chicks were in NO hurry to leave this new structure. We really threw them a curve at such a young age.

It took them a couple of days to do the "dance"... I described it the first year. For those of you who missed it, here it is again:

- 1) stick head out of opening and pull back.
- 2) put body in opening and look around.
- 3) put body in opening and lean forward, then panic and race back.
- 4) step out (and down), panic and hop back inside.
- 5) come out, stand there (or take a couple steps) and race inside.
- 6) come out and look around, then saunter inside.



As of today (July 19), my opinion of these Freedom Rangers is not positive. They are old enough now to be completely comfortable in the pasture.

- Yes, they are bigger... but they are not better from a behaviour point of view.
- They kick out seed and don't have any desire to eat it off the ground. BIG WASTE.
- Some of them appear to be foraging, but not the majority.
- Unlike all of the other chickens we've had, they sleep by the hardware cloth and not back in the sheltered area.
- They don't understand the moving of the mobile coop... they go back to where the smell/previous day's poop is instead of into the chicken tractor. (Granted more and more of them are figuring it out, but they are MUCH slower to catch on than any other chicken has been.)
- They are pecky. Even though the Dark Cornish have a reputation for being aggressive, they aren't as cockerells. But these Freedom Rangers are aggressive as chicks. I've seen sparring that has drawn blood... something that NEVER occurs between the Cornish I've had and have.
- So far, the only positive thing I can say about them is that they don't appear eager to escape the electric fence.

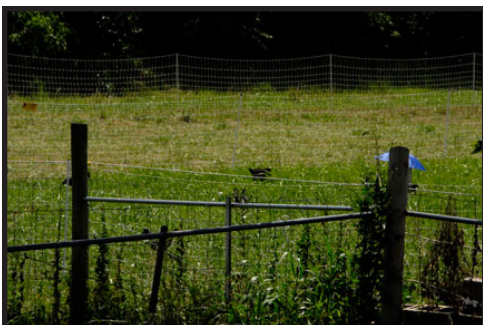
DARK CORNISH AND TURKEYS

I continue to like the Dark Cornish in spite of their slower growth. LOL, especially after having experienced the Freedom Rangers! AND I really have come to LIKE the turkeys! I'm pretty sure we will have turkeys for sale next year.

These three photos show the progression of moving the Cornish/Turkeys every few days. There are two (2) Cockerell Campers inside a single space designated by two (2) electric poultry fences. So they have the same amount of space as the hens do.



The first pic shows them close to the tree line, the second shows them moved directly west of that location (closer to the house). This is the view from the back porch. I very much like being able to see the Cornish/Turkeys since a few of them (especially the Blue Slate Turkey) still find ways to escape the fence. They also have figured out how to get back in, thank goodness. (Not Blue though, I have to go out and usher her back in when she asks.)



This is a close up of the two locations, the lighter, trampled area is the previous location (can you see the 2 fences? the far one is the old one that we just haven't removed the fence yet. the close one is the current boundary.) See how much greener the fresh pasture is.

The birds let us know when an area is used up (more get out for one thing, LOL)... then we shift them to the new area and it will take several days to "bounce back" and be lovely and lush. We don't go back over an area for at least six (6) weeks (just like with the cattle) so it can fully recover and be better than before.

The umbrella? OK, that is actually a novelty hat. I like to put a cover over the waterer to reduce algae and heat gain. I was going to buy some extra feeder covers (those green “hat” things), but they want \$30+ apiece for them. I like to think outside the box and went looking for a less costly alternative.

The novelty umbrella-hat works well in little to no wind, but it comes off in high winds. Not a big deal to put it back on... haven't lost one yet (of course, if I know a storm is coming, I remove it). And at \$7 each, it's a great alternative.



FYI, we have not clipped wings this year. With this large area for the Cornish, they have the chance to test out their wings without us having to worry about them accidentally flying over the fence. The ones getting out have been pushing through the fence... we figure they are not getting shocked because they jump up a bit to get through and so are not grounded when they touch the wires. And we don't want to trim the turkeys at all. Red and White don't seem to care about leaving the area... just Blue has decided to roam.

Honestly, I'm OK with Blue roaming, because I need to get used to that and she always wants to go back with the other birds for seeds and water and shade.

Speaking of Turkeys... this is one thing they do consistently: want to sleep on top of the Cockerell Camper. They don't understand the danger of owls. Every night requires either picking up the birds (including the few Cornish who like to be with the Turkeys) or chasing them into the Camper.

If we have Turkeys next year, I'm going to have to develop a different mobile set-up for them, obviously.



On a sad note, the crossbeak chicken left us a couple of weeks ago. I found it huddled on the ground, panting and could tell it was dying. So I did the hard thing for me and the better thing for the chicken: I quickly broke its neck (crying and praying at the same time) and left the body out in the woods so it could be food for an animal. Death is part of life and not being afraid of death is necessary on a farm (and everywhere, it seems to me). There is a line from the movie “DragonHeart” about death being a release, not a punishment. While in the movie it was said by a cruel man, I don't believe the concept is cruel: I could have made that chicken starve to death... that would have been cruel.

EGG LAYERS

There isn't much to tell about the hens, HURRAY. Boredom (or should I say, no excitement) on a farm is rare and strangely to be treasured.

Here the EggMobile is on an area that had been baled for hay a couple days earlier... so it is quite a bit shorter than the ladies are used to and we had to move them sooner because there was less plants to nibble.





This year the hens are following the cattle through the pasture, and that means most of the grass is chewed and trampled, but we still have to go over it with the mower set at about one foot off the ground to make it easier for the hens (and us, LOL).

The hens (and the rooster) come running these days because I have been treating them to excess Japanese Beetles in the trap bags. (I do it this when it's cool and the Beetles are not prone to fly off.) You can see the new Shade/Cover Structure in these photos. Info about that is on the Coop Construction page.



Not so lovely any more is our rooster. He has turned out to be a pain... not to us humans, but to the hens. He scratches the feathers off their backs in the act of sex. He pulls out feathers on their necks in his attempts to hang on and also when trying to catch the girls. He is really pushy toward them and hardly ever do I see him doing the courting dance any more.

You can see that he is definitely hen pecked. They are not shy about telling him what for.

All in all, this rooster experience has been tough on my girls. Since I don't hatch any eggs, the rooster will be going through processing with the meat birds this year. Bye bye birdie. (shameless musical reference, LOL)

FEEDING JAPANESE BEETLES (NOVEMBER 2014)

If you've done any searching on this website, you'll know that I have berry plants that I am protecting from Japanese Beetles by using a Lure and Trap system. The bonus to this system is that I store the beetles I trap and feed them back to the chickens as a winter insect protein. You can read about my system on the Insect Management Page. This summer, I put out 14 traps (3 more than last year) and ended up filling my 22 cubic foot deep freeze with Japanese Beetles BEFORE the end of the season (which runs from about a week before the Summer Solstice to about the middle of August... so roughly two (2) months).

I decided to see if the chickens would eat the extras even though they had plenty of other insects to eat in August. So since I collect the beetles first thing in the morning (when it's still cool), I was able to simply shake the bags so the beetles (still stupefied from the cool) would fall onto the ground where the chickens would gobble them up (or so I hoped). Success! A few beetles did escape (hopefully only to find their way back into one of the traps... after all they were lured once! LOL) but the majority of them were happily consumed by all the chickens on the farm.

The hubby accompanied me one morning and took these photos of the hens swarming for their treats. The meat birds and turkeys also got beetle treats, but no photos of them, sorry.



As soon as any of the chickens saw me walking the traps, they scurried to that fence and started talking to me. (I had to be careful approaching the meat birds because in their excitement some would get shoved through the electric poultry fence and then I had to figure out how to get them back in without anyone else getting out. AGH.

I had to be very careful stepping over the fence so as not to put a boot down on top of a chicken (as you can tell from the photos).

I went to the shade structure (or the shade of a cockerell camper) each time so that I could put the beetles into a shady spot (translation: the less warmth, the slower the beetles move).



It's kinda tricky maneuvering seven (7) bags full of beetles in such a way as to pile the beetles around so everyone has access to them and keep the bags from being pecked at by the chickens who can't wait for me to shake the beetles out.

My strategy is basically to turn in a circle making beetle piles as I go. Some chickens always move with me while others wait to pounce on what ever is left. This way everybody gets some beetles.

This photo shows me putting some under the shade structure with a relatively small number of chickens underfoot... this is because the rest of them are swarming the half-circle just to the right of the structure (outside the photo).

I will take a moment to comment on my clothing. These are work clothes, period. They are not intended to be pretty. They are relatively cool, keep the sun off me and dry quickly (so I can hose myself off if I want to). The hat was a new purchase that turned out to be TOO hot in spite of the nice shade cloth hanging down. I returned it to Bass Pro Shop and went back to my usual brimmed hat with a hole in back for my ponytail to hang out.

The only 'fashion statement' here are my boots. I do love my polka dot boots! They are short enough that my big calves are not an issue and they keep my feet dry. I buy a size too big so I can wear heavy socks in the spring and fall. (I get them at TSC.)



With each bag, at some point I have to maneuver the beetles that have gotten stuck trying to get out through the weep holes back into the bag to be shaken out. This is pretty messy because there is beetle poop involved. (Now you know why I like to use the hose.) I don't like to let any beetle escape, if I can help it and if I don't get those guys out, they end up being rinsed into the soil during the cleaning process.

Once I've emptied all the bags (whether to the chickens or to the freezer), I rinse them thoroughly and hang them on the clothes line to dry overnight and use the next time. I get pretty wet during this washing/rinsing process.

One more image of the last bag (on this day) being shaken out.

The chickens ALL love getting those Japanese Beetles. So much so that they were obviously disappointed in me when I visited them without bags in my hand after the season ended.

Not to worry though, I am loved again in the winter when I am the bearer of roasted cracked navy beans one day and Japanese Beetles the next.



THE TURKEYS (NOVEMBER 2014)

Since I don't have a separate page for the Turkeys, I'll tell you what I think of them and what's going on with them here.



Unfortunately, I find that I did not take any photos of the White Broad Breasted or the Bronze Broad Breasted turkeys. Although I do see the Bronze (I called her "Red") in the upper left corner of this photo.

Here you see the Blue Slate heritage breed turkey that I call "Blue".

She LOVES to roost! She also flies very well and most days she made her way out of the chicken area to forage. Unfortunately, she never seemed to figure out that she could fly back in and so she and I developed a routine in that she would "Whit, whit" at me and I would come out and turn off the electric and then pull up on the net so she could scurry underneath when she wanted to go back in.

I've decided that Blue will stay on the farm when the other two (2) turkeys are processed for a couple of reasons. First, I've had a personal relationship with her and I REALLY like her! She has personality out the wazoo and is SO PRETTY. Second, when we put the turkeys in with the hens (after the meat birds were processed); Blue showed a remarkable ability to keep the Buff Orpingtons in line... she polices the ones that peck at the other hens. She created a job for herself! That is how you earn a place on a farm.

The hubby and I had planned to process the White and Bronze turkeys on the farm. But, with only the three (3) turkeys and being able to tell them apart and therefore get to know them... well, I just couldn't do it here. Thankfully, there is a processor in Archie (which is an hour away) that does them for a fair price. So, Red and White were placed in one of the dog crates which was on a tarp in the back of the van at bedtime and that made leaving before dawn easier on them and me. They seemed to sleep most of the way and the only sounds I heard from them were when we took them out of the crate. Yes, I got emotional. What a surprise.

Picked the meat up in the afternoon and since I don't feed corn, the weights were less than the published average. White was 8 lbs and Red was 10 lbs (the average is 10 to 15 lbs for a hen of each breed).

Will I have turkeys for sale next year? Hmmm, still on the fence there. You'll have to keep an eye on the Status Report to find out.

HOWEVER, I do plan to get a Blue Slate Tom so Blue can have a mate. So I may be selling Blue Slate poults (chicks) in a couple of years. No promises yet.

CHICKEN PROCESSING (NOVEMBER 2014)

Thanks to Dotty Sharp for passing along my requests for processing help among her friends/groups on Facebook! It was successful! A very nice couple contacted me and were able to help us with the last batch of birds... most of which were the Freedom Rangers.

Thanks to Terry and Tanya (and their kids: Ginna and Noah), we were able to process 33 Freedom Rangers in MUCH LESS time than just Gary and me. SO grateful for the help! And, yes, they went home with some well earned chickens.

This year's setup. Looks like these photos were taken late in the day.

Dirty area starts on the west side of the red barn, where the crates with birds are in the shade.

Kill cones (far right in the photo) have buckets under them while in use. (Hose with sprayer to clean knife and person doing the work.)

Double burner propane camp stove with a HUGE aluminum stock pot (for the scald) and a turkey fryer pot (to keep hot water in to regulate the scald temps). Timer and thermometer and silicone oven mits (see 2013 processing for info on that).



Whizbang drum plucker (far left in the photo) and hose with sprayer (cuz you have to spray the carcasses as they get plucked).

Holding coolers with cold water where the plucked chickens wait to be eviscerated.

And spray bottles... one with soap and one with bleach.



Clean side is under the ShelterLogic shed.

Buckets for waste (rotated to keep as few flies around as possible). Hose for the sink on the camp table and a hose to spray down the carcass before it goes into the coolers with ice and water (4 hour chill).

I'd say we go through 2 sprayers of soap in a weekend and 1 sprayer of bleach.

I soak everything on the dirty side down with soap before we start to make cleaning up later easier. Sals Suds is still my preferred soap for this purpose.

Everything on the clean side is soaped, bleached and rinsed before and after processing each day.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE FREEDOM RANGERS: ... NEVER AGAIN.

The Freedom Ranger (FR) chickens won't be coming to this farm anymore. Yes, they are bigger birds than the Dark Cornish, but it is mostly bones as opposed to more meat... also more fat; AND they have different gizzards than the Cornish... not as easy to clean for one thing.

Terry and Tanya seemed to have positive opinions about how the FRs processed and it took me awhile to understand this. Their perspective is derived from processing chickens that were worse than the FRs. They weren't here on Sunday when we finished the Dark Cornish.

Whereas my perspective is derived from only a comparison to the Dark Cornish (DC).

So, as compared to the DCs:

- The FRs took so much longer to die. Some were alive even when they had obviously finished bleeding out.
- They barely fit in the scalding pot and sucked up the heat making keeping up on the temperature consistency a pain, not to mention getting a good scald.
- They carry a great deal more feathers and the drum plucker had a tough time getting them plucked in the amount of time I'm used to. We would have to add a bunch more "fingers" to accommodate them in the future.
- They are definitely bigger than the DRs and that also was a problem in the drum plucker as it is currently. They didn't bounce around as well and got legs stuck too often.
- Evisceration was about the same. The larger size made some things easier.
- Their gizzards caught me by surprise... The 2 openings were not in the same place as the DRs. And it was really difficult to pull the muscle away from the stomach sack.

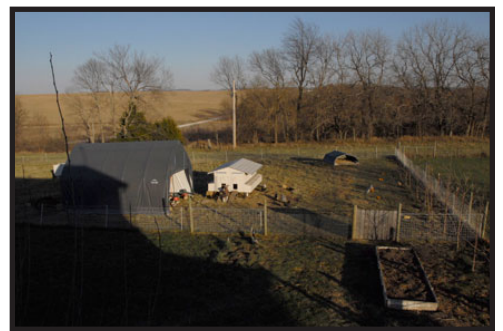
So, there you have it. I am grateful for the experience of raising the Freedom Rangers because it has convinced me even more to stick to the Dark Cornish.

Oh, almost forgot... we also processed the Light Brahma rooster. That was tough for me because as I carried him from the EggMobile to his crate to wait for his turn, he held onto my finger with this feet... it felt like when a child wants to hold your hand but can only get their fingers around your finger. Yes, I cried and I continued to cry for the 5 minutes it took for him to bleed out. We processed him the day after the FRs, so I figured it would take him longer to bleed out, but didn't realize just how long it would take. He did not fight it and died pretty quickly, considering. I dubbed his carcass "Stewie" when I vacuum packed it, so I would remember how to cook it. That was a really BIG chicken.

OVERWINTERING SETUP (NOVEMBER 2014)

Since we had to buy two (2) more electric poultry fences this year, I have enough to expand that pasture. It now encompasses the fruit trees which (hopefully) will help keep any deer or other nibblers away from them. I just have to share how excited I was setting up the fences... silly maybe, but it doesn't take much to make me happy.

SO, I have to put the fencing along the permanent fences along the back yard (where our dogs have full access) and the front yard (where I don't want chicken poop on my porch); which means leaving the walk through gate and the drive through gate unfenced. I start one fence going along each of those two areas and then kept adding a fence to each end.



At some point I have to put a fence (or more) going across the north side to connect the two lengths and was REALLY hoping to be able to include the fruit trees inside the area. You won't be as amazed as I was, BUT the entire area was enclosed by four (4) of the fences.

No overlap, no gaps to worry about... just exactly the amount of fencing I needed. Wow, the little blessings can be as satisfying as the big ones. LOL

In the previous photo, the old Chicken Ark is in the front yard. I decided to put it there in case we need a hospital wing again this year... hoping not.

A few of the Dark Cornish hens have figured out how to use the wood gate to pop over into the front yard. So far, they are the only ones, which does not concern me. They figured out how to get back in on their own as well. Plus, they follow me back in when I bring food. LOL

Blue on the other hand... has flown into the dog yard several times and can't figure out how to get back in with the chickens. So I've had to catch her and lift her over the fence. I have to check to see if she is in that yard before I can let out the dog.

The other day, we heard some noise on the porch (goes into the dog yard) and found that Blue was on the porch and our Newfoundland Dog (Phaerghus) was trying to sniff her... had his big head over her and she was freaked out! Wouldn't you be? The hubby removed Phaerghus while I caught Blue and carried her into the chicken yard. So far, she has not flown back into the dog yard. Can it be that she has learned from this? I would not bet on it. Turkeys are smart in some ways and not so much in others.

PHAERGHUS MEETS THE CHICKENS (DECEMBER 3, 2014)

Phaerghus (pronounced "Fergus"... our 135 lb. Newfoundland Dog) met the chickens for the first time on December 3, 2014. Several of the Dark Cornish hens decided to go into the 'Big Dog Yard'... One was in the 'party crate' (the dog kennel in the photo). At first Phaerghus just looked at them; he had tried chasing birds before with no luck catching them. I tried to get to the gate before he made his way there, but alas I am slow.

The hens in the meantime did the classic freeze, that is until he got close and then they scattered. A couple flew back into the overwinter pasture, one got through the fence into the front yard and the remaining bird couldn't figure out how to get out of the kennel, in spite of there being no roof at the moment.



Phaerghus pinned it in a corner with a big paw and I was screaming "leave it, not a toy!" as I arrived and finally pulled Phaerghus back enough that the chicken escaped leaving the pile of feathers behind (a trick to make the predator think it's still there). Unfortunately, Phaerghus was not tricked and chased the poor bird along the fence as it tried to find a gap.

Again hollering "leave it", I followed and my words apparently made their way through to Phaerghus' brain, because he stopped a few inches from the bird and I was able to pick it up and toss it over the fence into the overwinter pasture.

Phew! Too much excitement first thing in the morning. That will teach me to check the yard for chickens before I let the dog out!

All is well, chickens are all fine and it only took them about half an hour to venture close to the fence that borders the dog yard. LOL

UPDATE: I did find out the pinned chicken now limps. I've checked it's leg and nothing appears to be out of joint or broken, and the limp is less than it was originally. So, I assume it is healing. She gets along fine regardless and DOESN'T venture near the fence any more.

FROM WINTER TO SUMMER PASTURE -- HENS (APRIL 2015)

I had planned to move the hens out of their winter pasture by the Spring Equinox at the VERY latest... really wanted them moved a couple weeks before... BUT the tractor was in disrepair and the hubby (who works on it) was away on business part of March. The tractor finally got working in time for the Expo and that meant I would be TOO tired to do it on Saturday. Viola! Sunday the 29th was moving day! And about time to considering the opossum and hawk visits; a sure sign the chickens have been in the same place for too long.

I had already planned to clean the coop before we moved, so that got done after the hawk strike. Then it was time to collect eggs and prep for the move.

The routine of moving the Eggmobile hadn't been done since November 2014 and we were a little rusty, LOL. I had put up the electric poultry fence a couple weeks earlier (ever the optimist), so that was done. OOPS, except the grass has REALLY been growing, so I had to take it down and mow the lines again to keep the fence from grounding because of tall grass. No big deal though, easy enough to put it back in place after the mowing.

Reduced the number of feeders from six (6) to four (4) since there is less pushing at the feeders in the summer, what with all the plentiful pasture. Changed the waterers from metal to plastic (still two (2) of those)... but OOPS, one waterer would not seal so I replaced it with a metal winter type (until I can fix that problem). It's so much easier to move all of these things before dark and the chickens still had water, so no problem there. Loaded concrete blocks onto the tractor using the hitch cargo carrier and put them in place under the feeders and waterers.

Removed the straw bales from under the EggMobile and removed the chock blocks. Found another turkey egg in the process! WooHoo. (Those won't have been fertilized, by the way.)

Then we just had to wait for the chickens (and turkey) to go inside. Once they were all in, we closed up the coop as usual and took down enough of the electric fence to get the tractor in and the Eggmobile out.

Not sure if I've narrated the moving of the Eggmobile... so just in case:

We remove the ramps to the pop-holes and lay them over the roof of the EggMobile for the ride. (Since they are hinged they sit very nicely over the peak.)

The tractor (operated by the hubby) is backed up to the trailer and we use a 3-pt lift with trailer ball on the tractor so it's easy to adjust the height of the ball and position it under the trailer hitch. When it is seated properly, the tractor lifts the tongue and holds it there while we shift the concrete blocks from under the tongue to on top of the nest box lids for the ride. Then we remove the two (2) jack stands (which we use to level the trailer left to right and front to back) and put them on the nest box lids for the ride as well. The chocks are removed and the Eggmobile is levelled before moving it a few feet to collect any concrete that we have used to raise a wheel.

Once everything is connected, loaded, etc. The tractor hauls the Eggmobile into the new space (the electric fence is opened a couple of sections to accommodate this) and is situated next to the where we have already placed one set of feeders and water. I like those items to be on the north side of the Eggmobile with the pop-holes facing east. This works well for purposes of wind and rain protection.

The tongue of the Eggmobile is raised a bit so we can put the concrete blocks under it and also the jack stands under the Eggmobile itself. Chocks are positioned at the wheels (and if necessary, concrete has already be placed to roll a wheel of the Eggmobile onto when on a hill). The hydraulic lift slowly releases so we can check positioning and if all is well, the Eggmobile ends up in a level position front to back and side to side.

We then roll the shade structure into place by the other set of feeders and water... positioned so that the tarp is angled in a way to maximize shade and minimize wind and rain from the southwest.

Lastly we put the ramps back in position, put the grit and calcium in place (one set under each structure) and double check the water to be sure it is open. (It only takes one time of forgetting to open the water to remember to do this!)

The tractor is removed and the electric fence reconnected and when we are certain everything is done, the electricity is turned on.

In the morning the chickens are THRILLED with their new space! It is definitely smaller than their winter pasture, but that's OK because in a week, they get to move to a fresh spot.



At left is the
BEFORE photo...

And at right is a panoramic
of the AFTER area...
doesn't it look wonderful!



THE CHICKS HAVE LEFT THE BUILDING (JULY 2015)

DISAPPOINTING NEWS ABOUT CHICKS

It's really difficult for me to write this update. I had a horrible time with chicks this year. 20% of the chicks died within a week of the arrival of each batch and I honestly can't figure out why. It's normal for a few chicks to die from the stress of travel, but this is an excessive number. And mostly they just died... no evidence of illness; a few did have 'pasty butt' and that is not uncommon (when you raise 100 chicks it's virtually impossible to capture every chick and clean off the butt plug if that occurs).

20% was the amount I over-ordered as a buffer figuring those birds would go into my freezer. Well, no chicken for me this year and depending on hawk strikes or other unforeseen fatal issues, there may not be enough chickens to cover the pre-orders. This bothers me immensely because I don't want to let the people who placed good faith in me down. Yes, they know that there are risks and these things happen.

Anyway, I am a full-disclosure kind of gal and anyone deciding to get into meat chickens should be aware of this kind of thing.

I may be too soft-hearted to continue to raise meat chickens by purchasing day-old chicks. We shall see how I feel about it later.

CHICKS ON PASTURE

Even though they were only four (4) weeks old, we moved the first batch chicks out of the brooder and into the cockerel campers. Their food, water, grit and heat lamp were all inside with them and they were safe and secure while getting used to the great outdoors. The first batch was a mix of meat chickens (Dark Cornish cockerels) and egg layers (Black Australorp pullets) and they did fine being mixed together (with the turkey poults) in the brooder. I decided to divide them when we moved them to the campers because the campers don't hold as many birds each. So some of the birds were parted from their friends. Bummer for them.

Because they are WAY too young to be out and about on their own, I did supervised sessions so they could get used to coming out of the campers and experiencing grass et al.

This set up uses the chick fencing I purchased in 2014 -- it didn't work well because it was 4-ft high and it was a pain to get in and out of the chick area. So, I cut the chick fence in half lengthwise and used 3-ft rebar woven through the hexagon openings to secure it into the ground.

Each camper had it's own area of chick fence inside the electric poultry fence (which was turned off while I was inside, LOL).

FYI, the turkeys had their own electric poultry fence at this point.



We did not clip wings this year. Most of the chicks stayed in the 2-ft chick fence, but the ones that went over either figured out how to get back in or we pulled out a rebar or two and created a gap for them to go back in under the fence as needed.

This is a Black Australorp pullet finding something next to the chick fencing.

This is one of the smaller Dark Cornish chicks. As you can see, it is not fully feathered and that was the case with most of the first batch of cockerels. They seemed to take FOREVER to get their feathers.



This is a series of images of the combined setup. Once the chicks were older and could be out of the camper unsupervised, I put two (2) electric poultry fences together to make one very large area.

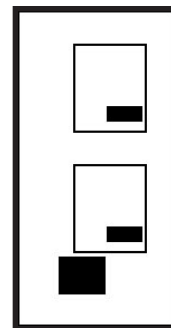
The turkey coop was placed at the end near the electric poultry fence.



Each chick fence area was doubled to create about the same area as the previous single poultry fence had for each group.

It's not so easy to see the setup in the photos, so at right is a drawing as seen from above.

The campers are moved over one width each day to provide fresh grass for the night within each chick fence area.



This setup provided the outer area strictly for the turkeys (which is not to say that they did not get into the chick areas often and had to be shooed out).

The turkeys were big enough that they didn't need chick fencing and, besides, they have Blue to watch over them.



The heat lamps are still attached because it was a cool spring.

There is a hose (red line) to bring water close to the waterers. I don't use automatic waterers... a bucket and a hose work great to refill waterers since I go out every day to move campers anyway. That is also when I check their food and grit to see if they need more.

It's quite a sizeable area as you can see from this image. I am standing at the electric fence shooting inside.

The amount of space let us shift the chick fence areas closer to me before having to move the entire setup.

I'd say they spent two (2) weeks in this spot, moving the campers daily and the chick fence after one (1) week.



It was a little difficult to tell when the turkeys were IN with the chicks or just in the gap BETWEEN the chick fences. I'd say this image is of a turkey between the chick fences. (But I could be wrong, LOL.)

I had intended to keep the groups separated completely but I would have needed to buy additional feeders and waterers and I decided I didn't want to put that much money into them.

So, after the second big move (about 8 weeks old), I took away the chick fencing between them and let them hang out all together again -- even with the turkeys. Besides, I needed the chick fence for the next batch.

The second batch of meat chickens came out of the brooder at four (4) weeks as well, but it was because the weather got too hot too quickly to leave them there longer. Having learned from the first batch, I set up the single electric poultry fence with the chick fence just inside it (not touching it) so that I didn't have to move that stuff so often. Honestly, it was a pain to pull up the rebar and try to keep it woven in the fencing and reinsert the rebar into the ground. Worse was removing the rebar completely and then moving the fencing and reweaving it into the fence.

BUT, I like it generally. It helped keep those little birds where they were supposed to be.

The second batch grew more quickly than the first batch and adapted more quickly as well. They are definitely over achievers, LOL.

THE NOT SO PLEASANT SIDE OF RAISING CHICKENS

(This is from my Facebook posting of May 19): "I am more and more thinking about getting rid of the chickens. As much as I like my eggs and eating chicken that I know is healthy... Last night the lead rooster [the one that guards the EggMoible] attacked me from behind leave bloody scratches on my calves. I fought back using the empty egg basket like a bat and sent him flying. Then I made sure the wounds bled so they would not get infected. This made the hens start pecking at the wounds which made me swat them away as I gathered eggs and removed brooding hens from nests."



EggMobile Rooster (#1)



EggMobile Rooster (#2)



EggMobile Rooster (#3)

I have decided to sell the roosters. If you are interested, contact me. You will have to catch the one(s) you want and contain them for your trip yourself. I'm only asking \$20.00 each. If they aren't sold by the time we process the first batch of meatbirds (last weekend of August), they will be the first ones processed and will go into my freezer.

(Also from the May 19 Facebook post): "Today I discovered the Black Australorp chicks had started pecking at ANOTHER chick, this time on both wings and it was really bad. By the way, did I mention they had pecked a chick to death over the weekend? I couldn't deal with this behavior and caught the latest victim and put it outside the fencing. As I went about my chores, I could think of no way to keep the chick separate and decided to do the humane thing and kill it quickly. Unfortunately, I am not good at killing and after 3 tries to wring it's neck it was still alive. Unfortunately, the hubby was not available to finish the job and I didn't know any other way. I carried it to our compost area and left it for whatever wild critter needs a meal. I hated doing it and cried the entire time out and back. When I got back I saw another chick with a bloody spot that she was covering with her wings. I hope she is OK. I don't want to do this again." [Update: Luckily, that was the last one.]

A FEW THOUGHTS ON RAISING CHICKENS

Once the chickens get to pasture, they are much more pleasant to deal with. There are still worries though... hawks, dogs/coyotes, owls, other predators; are the ones that get out of the fence finding their way back into the fence; are there females in the batch of males that will get hurt from all that 'cockiness'; are they getting what they need to eat; etc.

The day to day care gets to be relatively routine and I've gotten much more relaxed about the birds that get out of the fence to forage (especially when I see them make their way back in without my assistance, LOL). The hubby has taken to helping me do the chicken chores. Between the two (2) of us it takes about an hour to care for all three (3) groups in the evening. We check to see if they need more grain (which we then fill), more water (usually every day for each group in the summer), move their coops (meatbirds only, the hens move weekly), and gather eggs. Oh, and once the freezer is filled with Japanese Beetles, feed the excess trapped beetles to the birds.

I would dearly love to see other people getting into raising chickens for meat the way I do. I can only feed another couple of families on my 20 acres, but that is better than none. And if more people fed a couple of other families... more people could eat healthier, local meat. If you want to get into doing this, I am HAPPY to mentor you! If I can do this, you can do this. (You might want to check out my latest blog about that here.)

A DIFFICULT DECISION (OCTOBER 2015)

I have decided to no longer have poultry on the farm. That includes hens (to produce eggs), meat chickens, and turkeys. I initially wanted to get out of animals completely, but have ended up keeping the cattle (and the honeybees, which were going to stay regardless).

As you may (or may not) know, animals require daily attention and that makes going away from the farm for even a couple of days VERY difficult. Of course, if you have family, friends or help of some other sort that are able to cover for you then it's not such a big deal.

Neither the hubby nor I have family in the KC Metro area. What friends we have lead lives that are not compatible with coming out to the farm to help on a daily basis or farm-sit for several days. A few people have expressed interest in helping out on the farm but, to date, conflicts of schedules have kept that from happening. The one person we thought was going to intern with us for the summer backed out.

After giving the matter a great deal of thought and discussion, we decided that at this time in our lives, we would like to have more leisure time and be able to travel occasionally. THANKFULLY, we DO have a neighbor who will take care of the cattle while we are away (they require a much lower amount of daily care).

SO, I am selling animals, equipment, supplies, feed, etc. I will be creating a page on the website showing what is for sale and how much it is. Everything must be picked up at the farm. Transportation of everything (especially containment of the animals) is the responsibility of the buyer.

I am open to the prospect of someone who wants to do the kind of sustainable farming I do taking over the animal side of the farm. We would have to work out some kind of agreement that would be very clear that neither I nor my husband would take care of the animals... that the person managing the animals would have to other helpers to cover their absences.

Please contact me if you or someone you know would be interested in discussing this option. It will probably take me a couple weeks to get valuations done, photos taken, listing completed, etc. So this option is only available until I am ready to sell and the Status Report will change to let you know when that is.

UPDATE ON POULTRY

On October 30th, we transported the turkeys and laying hens to the processor in Archie MO (just under 2 hours away) which meant getting up at 3:00 am to get them into crates and make it there by 6:30 am. It was sad for me. We took in 15 turkeys and 1 of them didn't pass inspection so we ended up with 14. There were 48 hens and 2 of those didn't pass inspection so we have 46. The processor is USDA inspected so all the poultry are OK to sell. If you are interested in a turkey or a few chickens, email or call me.

Fall is always about cleaning up, preparing for winter and also for spring. This year I have extra work cleaning up all the poultry stuff and packing it away for possible future use (or future sale). I'm not sure what happened, but sometime on 11-5 while cleaning poultry feeders and waterers, something decided to take a bite out of my neck on the left side. I think it must have been a spider because it didn't hurt like a bee or wasp and it has a pretty good size hole unlike a mosquito. So I have a swelling and it is also affecting the gland that is just beneath the bite. Thankfully, I remembered to put warm compresses with epsom salts and Thieves essential oils on it to draw out any venom.

The extra work has also aggravated my plantar fasciitis so I'm trying to baby my foot as much as I can to take that pain down a notch.

THE LAST UPDATE ON POULTRY (JANUARY 2016)

I have cooked a couple of the turkeys and several of the hens. I was NOT happy with how they were processed. I cannot believe that such shoddy work passes USDA inspection. They would NOT have passed our on-farm quality control. It is understandable for there to be some pin feathers left on the skin, but full size feathers is NOT OK in my books. Plus they removed the skin from the necks and completely cut off the "butts" on ALL the poultry. The livers contained multiple bile sacks which contaminates the contents of the entire container WHICH also contained the hearts. I paid to get the gizzards and there were none. It's a good thing I won't be needing to use that processor again and I certainly won't be recommending them to anyone.

The birds themselves (once properly cleaned) are excellent. The turkeys are exactly as I expect a Heritage Breed Turkey to be, which is to say TASTES AMAZING. The hens are fattier than the Dark Cornish Cockerels which makes sense and the flavor, while not quite up to par as the Dark Cornish is still quite good. The hubby and I agree that having a bit of fat on the meat does help make us feel full sooner.

The roosters (that I tried to sell and was unable to and processed on farm) are quite nice size as adult Dark Cornish, but they definitely have a stronger "chicken" smell which took me right back to processing, LOL. I cook them in the crock pot (low and slow) and the meat is SUPERB. I remove the skin and the fat (before serving) and use that with the bones to make a very nice bone broth.

It has taken us a few months to eat the leftover eggs and I can tell you for a fact that it takes four (4) months in the refrigerator for one of my eggs to become old enough to hard boil so that the shell comes off without taking all the white with it. And even though they are "old", they taste great!

I sure do hope I can find someone local who wants to take over my equipment et al and raise chickens the way I did so I can get amazing meat and eggs.