

# PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



## STATUS REPORTS : 2007 THRU 2014

### PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Status Reports" 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.

### BACKGROUND

Many years ago, I discovered the USGBC (United States Green Building Council) and its LEED® Program (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). And, although at that time it was only for commercial construction, I decided that it was a good place to start networking. Surely, one of those members would know some residential architect or contractor or builder who would be interested in working with me on my sustainable house project...THEY DID!

And so, I was introduced to Ken Riead (of Hathmore Technologies, LLC). Ken is an Energy Rater and had also just finished building his own home (The Replete Residence) to showcase what energy efficiency options were available at that time to any homeowner.

Over the years, I have had the great fortune to become friends with Ken and Sharla Riead. Most recently, we co-authored a green building tool: DYO® Kits: Green Building Decision Kit. (DYO® Kits is a division of Hathmore Technologies, LLC.) I am very proud to be associated with such a fine group of people and comprehensive product. Shameless plug intended... in fact, go to the website and buy the thing! (You'll be glad you did!)

Hathmore Technologies, LLC has been engaged to be the Energy Rating company for the PHGB Project. Additionally, they will provide consulting on the HVAC and renewable energy systems AND will oversee the LEED® for Homes certification process.

Anyone who has built a home will tell you that there are peaks and valleys in the process: from soaring heights of excitement to deep, dark valleys of despair. We had some trouble when it came to architects (this is putting it mildly - set us back two years all told). But we made it out of the valley and ...

Ken introduced my husband and I to Roy Brown. Roy had been designing energy efficient, environmentally-friendly homes since the 1970s. Luckily for us, he was up to the task of taking my years of designing and re-designing the house and providing us with an end product that fits us to a "T". The house is designed in the American Bungalow style (at 2500+ square feet, no one would ever confuse this house for an actual bungalow... but after living in a 900 sq.ft. bungalow for 17 years, I am ready for a bit of space!). So, the plans were finally ready to take to a contractor.

### SUMMER 2007

I contacted the zoning commission in the county where we are building to find out what they require regarding permits and if there are restrictions we need to be aware of (on a 10-acre lot zoned agricultural/residential) and found out that they are not yet on the green building bandwagon. So, I've

explained about the project and have offered them a full record of our experience so that they can look at adopting a green building program. The county has been seeing an increasing number of people moving into it and residential building is on the rise. Hopefully, they will take the initiative and either adopt a program already in place (the county next door has one) or put one together themselves. Cross your fingers and toes!

## **AUGUST 2007**

It's time to get financing. We've approached the company that has the current loan on the land, but they are very conservative and our project is much too unusual for them to consider. So we've been shopping around and have two substantial leads which I will share with pleasure... Charlie Moberly, National City® Mortgage: 847-946-4130 and Keith Winterhalter, Citi Smith Barney: 816-932-7853.

## **SEPTEMBER 2007**

We are currently in the process of getting the financing in order. Have you ever had to jump through hoops? Well, that seems to be the order of the day.

## **NOVEMBER 2007**

CitiMortgage has been looking for green building projects to finance and we are thrilled that they have decided our project is just what they are looking for. We will soon complete the single closing for the Construction Loan and the Mortgage.

## **JANUARY 2008**

Nothing much to report this month. So, I'll just give you a bit advice... building green is still building. Therefore, it is essential to do "due diligence" when deciding on the members of your team.

Be sure that your builder (or general contractor) is legitimate, has good business practices, gives you references (be sure to contact them), includes agreed upon dates in the contract and sticks to them, etc.

Find a lawyer who does work in the construction industry and have contracts and other potential problem areas reviewed. If you are acting as the general contractor/builder, you will definitely want the assistance of a good attorney.

## **FEBRUARY 2008**

Well, they say change is good... but that is sometimes hard to believe. Unfortunately, we are having to change the time frame of construction for the PlayHaven Green Building (new residential construction) project. Because we have not had enough response to getting sponsors and because the systems we want to put in the house are high quality (translation: high dollar), we are not currently able to build the house within the construction loan amount for which we qualify. (Also, we discovered the builder we had chosen was telling us what we wanted to hear... not what we needed to know. He also did not want to provide financial information to the lender and when he was finally forced to... the lender would only work with him in a "contractors checkbook" manner. This means that he would send in the invoices and the lender would write the checks and send them to us for delivery to the sub-contractors. He wouldn't be allowed to handle the money at all. We opted to involve our attorney and end the relationship with that builder.)

We also discovered an issue that was quite unforeseen to us and might be to you...

We intend to use a great deal of materials that are "salvaged" (e.g. architectural salvage, purchased from Habitat's ReStore, found at auctions, etc.). But, because we don't already have all of the materials in storage, the contractor had to plan to purchase what we don't have in case we don't find have it by the time it is scheduled to be installed.

Another thing to remember is that the mortgage company needs to have accurate dollar amounts in place in the unlikely event that they would have to take possession of the project before completion. Therefore, the budget allowance needs to account for new materials to be purchased. However, if we had the materials already in hand, we would be able to include the value of those materials as a credit or equity.

So, we are delaying the construction of the new house construction. In the mean time, we have decided to purchase a house near the project site and make “green” improvements to it. Which changes the PlayHaven Green Building Project to two parts: 1) renovation of an existing residence and 2) construction of a new residence.

While we are renovating the existing residence, we will also be gathering the re-used materials for the new construction.

We are now pursuing sponsors for both parts of the project. This can be in the form of overstock materials in addition to new materials, monetary donation, etc. Details about Sponsorship are available [here](#).

The Projects page will include the information about renovation once we have established that information. Until then, the new construction information will remain in place by itself.

## **JULY 2008**

It's official and we've moved... right next door to where we will build PlayHaven Green. When you look at the pictures of our building site ([click here](#)), notice to the right (east) the house with the green roof that has the red barn with the white roof. That is our new home and our new project. We are lovingly/laughingly referring to it as “PlayHaven East” and the original acreage as “PlayHaven West”.

You know the old saying: “when God closes a door, she opens a window”? Well, our window opened on the east side of the land when our neighbor decided to retire to a bigger acreage in Kansas and raise more horses. So, this being a buyer's market, we found out what the market was in the area for that “package” and made an offer and after some negotiations - viola! its ours. So we now have double the acreage and a standard construction home to rehab into a net-zero home. We also have a big garage (the red gambrel barn building) that we can store those materials we will accumulate to build the new home on PlayHaven West. It will probably be several years before we can do that, but there is PLENTY to do in the meantime and I'll keep updating our progress here.

I'll be adding images of the house and grounds soon so you can see what we've started with.

The first step toward net-zero was to get an Energy Audit of the existing home. Hathmore Technologies, LLC provided us with two separate reports that first showed us the problems/issues with the house and second showed the results of the Energy Rating. [Click here](#) to go to the Project page (BUILDING SITE) to view those reports.

## **AUGUST 2008**

PlayHaven East is proving to be an excellent resource to showcase remodeling the green way. Which is a nice way of saying that we have discovered some problems that we were either not expecting, or not expecting to have to deal with right away.

We had planned to utilize an existing water well and put a ground-source heating/cooling system (which would also replace the current propane water heater) in before the next heating season. However, the cost of that system has increased substantially since I last investigated them and the well alone will not be enough for the loop, so we find that we are unable to do that at this time. We are investigating alternatives and will use the current propane system this winter (2008/2009).

The sump pump quit working less than two weeks after we took possession. Thank goodness there is a Home Warranty policy in place! A B May came out very quickly and replaced it the day after we

called. They had to come out again in August to repair a leak in a joint of one of the water lines. (And we asked for quote to have the plumbing updated.) I highly recommend having a Home Warranty policy when you buy a house.

So far we have saved about \$600 because of it.

Unfortunately, the policy does not cover structural problems and so, please learn from my experience... if there is a fireplace and/or wood stove in a home you are wanting to purchase, pay the extra money to have a professional chimney inspection done! The company that did our building inspection did not inspect the chimney and told us the flaking of the brick on the exterior was cosmetic and while it needed to be watched, was not a problem.

We have had water in our basement, coming in next to the brickwork around the wood stove, every time it rains. We now wish we had paid to have the chimney inspected separately because our first renovation will be the chimney. The source of the water in the basement is the chimney. [Click here to see the rest of the story and the solution we chose.](#)

## **SEPTEMBER 2008**

The mason (George Shull Masonry of Kingsville MO) and his assistant were out this week and the new exterior of the chimney is beautiful! They spent 2-1/2 days working on it and so we are all set for the new liner (which will happen later this month). I was very impressed with the efficiency and skills of these two men. [Click here for pictures and more about the exterior chimney repair.](#)

Another unexpected upgrade happened the weekend that hurricane "Ike" hit Texas. (Which was just before the repairs were made to the chimney.) We had five (5) inches of rain the day before Ike from a different storm and so had several soaked towels from the basements seepage. I put them in the Equator washer/dryer and when I went back to take them out; I discovered that the Equator had broken again... doing the same thing it had done previously which was repaired by salvaging a computer part from another Equator washer/dryer. We already knew that there were no more replacement parts to be found for this machine so we had to upgrade to a new washer and dryer (much sooner than we had expected to). [Click here for what we chose to replace it with and why.](#)

## **OCTOBER 2008**

The chimney liner is now in place and the company comes back mid-October to apply the waterproofing sealant to the crown. They are waiting to do that so that everything will be good and "cured" to avoid dampness being trapped in the chimney. We certainly don't want to have freezing and thawing of water to ruin all the hard work of the past month!

The liner et al is guaranteed for the life of the chimney so long as we have it inspected and cleaned each year (which we will be doing anyway). [Click here for the pictures of the chimney liner repair.](#)

Now all we need is a load of wood and a place to put it... will keep you posted.

We've also added a fenced area to the east of the "backyard". We'll use it for the dogs to do training, to put in a kennel building with dog runs, etc. But it could also be used for livestock.

We've taken a walking tour of the area north of the house so as to get measurements for the placement of planting beds, livestock buildings and fencing. Over the winter, we'll work out how to phase in these improvements. I'm also looking into raising rabbits for meat in addition to deciding what kind of chickens to keep and what other livestock to phase in to our self-sufficient, sustainable, organic farm. For more info about farming, [click here.](#)



Happy Earth Day! ... of course, to me, every day is Earth Day. It still amazes me how so many people just don't seem to get that pollution and deforestation and heavy metal poisoning and nuclear radiation and, and, and... is not a "those bleeding heart environmentalists" problem so much as it is a "life as we know it" problem. This planet will still be around after humanity as screwed up the air, water, vegetation, food source, etc. to the point of annihilation. Saving the Environment of the Earth is ALL about giving humanity (and all the other life forms that live here) a place to live. Not saving the Environment of the Earth is a Death Sentence.

Anyway, now I'm getting off my tallest soap box to share what's been happening around here for the last --- can that be true??? --- 6 months. Wow, time flies.

Visit the Chimney Project page to see the waterproofing sealant going on top of the chimney. (We'll be putting the chimney sealant on in the heat of the summer - so watch for that.)

The Holidays brought us Eco-Friendly Cookware and LED Decorative Lights.

Other than that, things have been pretty quiet here. Did I share with you my new love-affair with craigslist? I hear that there are people who have had problems (to say the least), but my experiences so far have been very enjoyable! Because we moved to a larger house than we were in, we have needed some additional furniture and I like to save money and get nice things, too. So, in the last year, I've been hitting auctions, estate sales, secondhand furniture stores, antique markets, etc. And I've found some great things... mostly through craigslist! My favorite is a Mission-style dining room set with an extendable table and six chairs (2 with arms) for the tiny price of \$300.

Now I'm my craigslist searches are mostly related to farm stuff like seeds, plants, livestock.

Looking back over the last couple of entries, I see that I neglected to share that not only were we getting water in the basement last fall, we were getting water in through the roof as well. And this with an 8-year old standing seam metal roof. How could it be? Well, it seems the previous owner neglected to mention in the disclosure information that while the metal roof is intact, it has been caulked many times on the north side of the first level. When my handy-hubby went up on the roof to install the TV antenna (yes, we still use a TV antennae - now with a digital converter) and the Cell antenna (boosts the signal to our cell phones and aircards way out here in the country), etc. he inadvertently caused the caulk to loose its seal. So, I wasn't just mopping up the basement with towels during the "Ike" storms, I was also figuring out how to capture the rain that was pouring into wall cavities and coming out the millwork on the north side of the house. Therefore, we have had to push the roof to the top of the priorities list. We've had two companies come out to give us estimates so far. Check out the Roof Project page for more...

We also had two insulation companies come out since that was what we were expecting to do this Spring. The previous owner had done a very odd attic insulation installation. There is fiberglass batt above the ceiling then drywall panels installed on top of the ceiling joists and blown-in fiberglass on top of that. The problem with it is that it makes the area between the two layers of drywall a prime environment for mold due to condensation. More info on the Insulation Project page, [click here](#).

So, as soon as we know how much the roof is going to cost us (it has to come first, as much as I'd like to tackle that insulation) we'll find out if the insulation can also be fixed this Spring/Summer or if we'll have to live with it for a while.

As far as farming goes, we've put in five 2x10 ft. beds with early spring plantings of potatoes and peas. Now that the weather has warmed up, we'll be adding more veggie beds. There are also four pumpkin mounds. And (thanks to craigslist) our compost area has been expanded (photos to come soon). I'm

investigating nut, fruit and berry tree/shrubs for an orchard and learning about livestock. [Click here for the Farming Project page.](#)

I promise it won't be six months before you see more news.

## **JUNE 2009**

Where do I start? We received the quote for the roof and here's the deal...

We had hoped that just the area where the leakage has occurred could be repaired/replaced. BUT (and this is what everyone who is looking into a metal roof or buying a house with a metal roof should be very attentive to), it turns out that the metal sheeting on OUR roof is -- first of all -- not a standard pattern and, therefore, it is not possible to repair/replace that one little area that is so problematic and makes me anxious every time it rains. Secondly, because we have NO DOCUMENTATION from the previous owner about the roof, we have no way of finding out what the warranty should be or to talk to the manufacturer. Thirdly, the quality of the metal sheeting on the roof is pretty poor. SO, even if we COULD find the pattern and the manufacturer, we probably wouldn't want to.

With all that being known, we asked the roofing company we will be using (Shamless Plug Alert), Kansas City Roofing Services, LLC, to give us pricing on replacing the entire roof in the most energy efficient, sustainable way possible (at least a "cool" roof). There's a whole lot more to the story, [click here to learn about an Energy Star "Cool" Roof and a whole lot more!](#)

The things we are learning! Please learn from our experiences!! I would not wish the worry/anxiety I have been going through on my worst enemy.

## **JUNE 2009 (MORE)**

I promised to keep you informed on the progress of the roof and there IS PROGRESS!

So, a quick recap: leaking roof, roofing company chosen, great energy efficient product found, insurance called: covered for hail or not?

And the good news is (drum roll, please): YES, WE ARE COVERED for hail damage AND since we chose 100% replacement coverage... we will have enough money to install the TPO (single-ply membrane) roof AND get the Energy Tax Credit AND qualify for discount on our home owners insurance! And most of all, I won't have to worry about rain leaking into the house anymore! WOO HOO! Please visit the Roof Project page for more!

I will also be keeping track of our electricity consumption over this cooling season and will report later this year a comparison from the season of 2008 to the season of 2009 (without and with the cool roof).

AND (I'm a little afraid to mention this -- don't want to jinx it) if all goes well, there may even be enough money left (from what we had budgeted) to fix the insulation this year after all. Crossing fingers and toes, sending out the intention that there IS enough money for the insulation as well.

Once Again --- WOO HOO and YIPPEE and HALLELUIA! One step closer to a net-zero house... they may be baby-steps, but it means we're moving in the right direction.

## **JULY 1, 2009**

We received the check from State Farm on Saturday, June 27 to replace the roof on the house. And, we were surprised to find that it was made out to us AND our mortgage company... I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised, but since we haven't had this big of a claim before, we didn't know that the mortgage company would be involved. [Learn more about how the insurance company and mortgage companies handle this type of thing... and more... on the Roof Project page.](#)

Ok, that should do it for now... updates should be coming along fairly often during the next couple of months!

## **JULY 22, 2009**

Kansas City Roofing Services LLC contacted us the end of last week to say that the roofing material is here!

SO, they are scheduled to start Monday, July 27; barring any bad weather delays, of course. YEAH! It has been SUCH a wet summer and soon I won't have to race around the house checking for water leaks any more. YEAH!

I'll have photos and such soon - promise! See them on the Roof Project page, [click here](#).

## **AUGUST 17, 2009**

I can't believe it's been almost a month since the last post. So, you are probably wondering about the roof, yes?

Kansas City Roofing Services started on Tuesday, July 28th and we've had a mixture of great weather and rain and wind. We figured the project would take longer than you would expect since the application is on steeper pitch than normal. And we were correct in that thinking. Plus, the rain has made it even longer.

## **SEPTEMBER 3, 2009**

The roof is 99% finished and the only thing holding it up from being 100% finished is the persistent rain! Seems like they get here, get started working and after about an hour we get rain. Even if its only for a short time, that messes things up because they can't work on the roof again until it has dried. So with the cooler weather and cloud cover, that takes several hours. They are down to 7 minor/detail things that need doing, so crossing fingers and toes that the rain stays away long enough for them to do them.

Visit the [Replace Metal Roof on House with TPO Everguard Roof Project](#) page for the pictures.

FYI - if you decide to put this roof on your house and like the Light Gray color... be sure to tell them you want the Energy Star Light Gray that qualifies as a cool roof and for the energy tax credit. The reason I mention this, is because when the roofers ran out of material and we waited for it to come in... it arrived and they put the first length on and realized that they had gotten the wrong color... it was Light Gray, but not the Energy Star qualifying one and was slightly darker than what was already on the house. So, a quick call to GAF and the correct color arrived at light speed (well, not REALLY "light speed"--but pretty darn fast!) a couple days later.

P.S. I just learned about Google's new search engine option: [www.Blackle.com](http://www.Blackle.com). Have you heard about it? Its the same search engine but the screen is black with white text and its supposed to help save energy. So, I've change my 'home page' from Google to Blackle... you might want to do the same... check it out: [www.Blackle.com](http://www.Blackle.com).

P.P.S. Watch for the next post, when I'll tell you about the lady who helps me to keep my house clean --- using green products! AND, about our new vehicle: its an E85 Flexfuel Dodge Grand Caravan. I always forget how much time it takes to set up and do the prep work. And since our house has three different pitches on the different gables and one of them is two-stories up, there are harnesses and extra gear to think about.

But things are moving along and what with the rain and wind and needing additional material, I can't complain. Visit the [Replace Metal Roof on House with TPO Everguard Roof Project Page](#) for the in-process pictures.

More to come soon, visit again and bring your friends!

## OCTOBER 13, 2009

There is lots to tell you this time, I'm breaking it up in to subsections:

### ARTICLE IN KC STAR

Go to [www.kansascity.com](http://www.kansascity.com) to see the article that Gene Meyer did regarding Energy-efficient Mortgages. He came out and interviewed me a few weeks ago and even had a photographer come out to get a picture of our new roof (yesterday).

### THE ROOF

WooHoo! The roof is done, finished, complete! And it actually has been for several weeks ... I've just fallen behind on updating the website.

And first of all, I have to tell you that the roof has already made a HUGE difference in the interior temperature of the house. Before, with the dark green roof, I had trouble keeping the inside temperature cooler than the outside temperature because the roof heated the attic space and our insulation is adequate but needs to be improved. NOW, the inside temperature is at least 10 degrees cooler WITHOUT turning on the AC. Granted we're getting temps between 75 and 80 these days, but before that meant I still had to use the AC to keep the temp in the house in the low 70s. NOT ANY MORE... YEAH! Read more on the Roof Project Page... [click here!](#)

### PAINTING/PRESSURE WASHING/SIDING

Now that the roof is done and its cooler outside, I've been able to start painting the house. We didn't get around to painting last year what with just getting settled in... so there is ALOT of maintenance painting that needs to be done. Plus I had to paint the exposed side of the OSB on the underside of the porch roof... which reminded me how much I dislike painting ceilings! Even with my handy-dandy Paint Stick (its a roller that uses the handle to store the paint while you roll it on) -- I used it to paint the living room if you want to know more about that item, check out Paint Project page.

For more info (with pictures) including the pros and cons of getting a pressure washer and how I discovered the siding is NOT cementitious fiber...visit the Project Page for Painting.

### THE VAN

We finally did it. We finally admitted that the 1992 Chevy Astro Van had to be replaced. We loved that van! It was the perfect dog vehicle for us. Big enough to haul our Newfoundland Dogs (for a while we had four (4) to haul around) and our gear but still rated as a mini-van! It had rear AC at a time when most vans did not. Well, when we took it into our mechanic to have the AC repaired (again... one of those things that was never as good as the original), we found out that Chevy was no longer making parts for it and had sold off the rest of their inventory. We were able to get the part, but only just. Which meant it would be more difficult to get parts the longer we kept it. SO... we bit the bullet and went looking for a replacement. Man, was that depressing research! Found some great websites though! Check out the info on the Project page for Vehicles.

## OCTOBER 21, 2009

Not much going on right now. The Astro Van just left on the tow-truck and I'm feeling a bit sad... had that van for 14 years and it hauled all of our dogs at one time or another, so it was like losing an old friend. On the bright side, the driver was thinking of people he knows that could use it... so hopefully it will help some other family for a bit longer; while bringing some money to Wayside Waifs to help animals in need.



I started the search for a plumber this week. We figure that considering how long everything takes in the world of remodeling/contracting... we better find the best company for our needs and get them booked for the spring. I see from my review of past entries that I didn't tell you the reason we want to update the plumbing. It is because the pipes in this house are polybutylene (which is a form of plastic resin that was used extensively between 1978 and 1995). This is not good piping! There were even class action lawsuits brought in the 1980s because of it. Learn more at the Plumbing Project page... [click here](#).

Are you wondering what happened to fixing the insulation? Nothing yet. We had hoped to have enough money left after the roof to get it done this fall... but you know how it goes: sometimes funds earmarked for one project end up going to another. I'm hoping that we'll be able to do the insulation next, but the plumbing does worry me more than the insulation at this point. So who knows.

We had a pretty good year when it came to our harvest. There's a list and more on the Farming Project page.

## **JUNE 1, 2010**

First things first: I apologize for not updating the website through the Winter and Spring. No excuses, just didn't get around to it and not much to report.

### **ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM**

We replaced our old Sony TV with the Sony Bravia VE5 1080p Eco LCD HDTV (40 inch)... see the Entertainment Center Project page for more info about that item. It is a very nice TV and among its many wonderful features is something Gary and I can remember from our childhood years: an OFF button. Yes, amazingly, you can turn the thing completely off so it doesn't use any phantom electricity. What will they think of next?

Along with the TV, we also updated to a DVR recorder that is also a DVD and VCR player. Plus we added a Sony Sound system... so now it really is an entertainment system.

### **SEALING DUCTWORK LEAKS**

We had a very cold winter and when we discovered that we had to order more propane to heat the house than we had anticipated, Gary dug out the caulk and mastic to (finally) seal up the ductwork. Visit that Sealing Ductwork Project page [here](#).

### **PLUMBING**

Yes, we did get the polybutylene out of the house this Spring! One less worry. Visit the Plumbing Project page to learn more.

### **ATTIC INSULATION**

And, YES, the old fiberglass and sheetrock (bad idea) in the attic is gone and replaced with blown-in cellulose! Visit the Insulation Project page for more information.

Eric Butler of Comfort Solutions says: "I wish everyone had a 'cool roof' - yours gave us the best working conditions I've ever been in." and "I left your job around 1:00 pm and had to do some work in my own attic which has asphalt shingles and the difference was amazing - my attic was probably 40 degrees hotter than yours and practically unbearable."

We'll be scheduling an new Energy Audit to see what the official difference is between the old and the new soon.

## SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

We have had another intense weather season this summer! Luckily, we were able to get the chimney treated during the hottest week of the summer... it is recommended to put a water repellant coating on the architectural stone and we had intended to do that last year, but the weather did not cooperate. So now the chimney is treated and that should last for 10 to 15 years. \*\* UPDATE (5-11-11): I just added the photos of the Brandon putting the sealant on the chimney. Here is the link to the Chimney Project page. \*\*

Getting the yard mowed and trimmed, etc. has been really tough because when the hubby had time it rained and when I tried to do it, equipment stopped working or was so hard to use, I could barely get anything done before zonking out. So, the latest addition to the Project is a Lithium-battery operated Grass Edger/Trimmer. Check out more on its Project page. (Cross your fingers and toes that we can get an electric riding mower next spring.)

The other thing I've been trying to spending my time on is the south deck. While it was still hot and dry, I planned to sand and repaint the floor... since the previous owner had already painted it. There's lots more to this story at the Deck/Porch Project page, click here to get to it.

Check back to find out the progress of our efforts.

## MAY 10, 2011

I didn't think anything had happened since September, so I haven't worried about updating the website... until I uploaded the photos from the BIG project in April and discovered several small things that we had done over the winter. So after I tell you the BIG news, I'll list the other small things to catch up with.

### NORTH SIDE REPAIRED AND RE-SIDED

The economy affects everyone and we are no exception. I had hoped to re-side the entire house, but when I found out how much it would cost (CHA-CHING!\$\$\$!)... had to settle for just the north side (excluding the porch area). At least, that meant removing the damaged siding in and around the bump out, insulating the bump out and putting up cementitious fiber siding. Visit the Siding Project page to see this project by clicking here.

### WHOLE HOUSE PAINTED

Because we couldn't afford to re-side the whole house, we had to paint the rest. Not just for the look of it, but for basic house maintenance to protect the old siding. Check out the pictures on the Painting Project page here.

### SOUTH PORCH

Let's see, when last I wrote, I was preparing to remove the elevated screws so as to sand the floor in preparation for Synta's Deck ReStore product. That has changed a bit. Last fall I was searching craigslist for lumber to make into raised beds for my vegetable (etc.) garden. I found 16 ft long, weathered 2x10s at an amazing price! I was able to get 48 of them delivered to us. And, as we were loading them from the trailer into our storage area, we realized they are a much better quality wood than what is currently on our south porch. We decided to replace the flooring with the new wood and use the old floor wood to make the raised beds. You can see the pictures of the progress on South Porch Project page.

### CHIMNEY SEALED

I have added the pictures to the Chimney Project page.

## COOKWARE

Cuisinart stood by its warranty when I found a flaw in my frying pan. More info on the Cookware Project page.

## PLUMBING

We had a leak, more info on the Plumbing Project page.

## YARD EQUIPMENT

No (darn it!), we don't have a new electric-riding-mower. But there is an update on the WORX trimmer. For more, visit the Yard Equipment Project Page.

## SPONSORS

We've added a couple more sponsors! Please check them out and consider them for your next project!

### MAY 31, 2011

A quick update... It took me a couple weeks (fitting it in mainly) to paint the porch; but, the whole house is now repainted (in addition to the north being re-sided)! We are no longer the Iceberg House! I don't usually put photos on this page, but this is a big change, so here are the before and after images.



Check out the Project List and see the details of all we've been able to accomplish in the last 3 years. Of course, there is more to do (isn't there always?)...

### NOVEMBER 2011

Tell the Department of Energy to KEEP the ENERGY STAR brand for home performance!

I just received an email from Efficiency First that says the ENERGY STAR program is being moved from the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to the Department of Energy (DOE). There is a chance that the ENERGY STAR name will be dropped. This would be a waste since so much of the home performance industry (including local and state programs) have invested millions to see that the brand succeed. Please join me and tell the DOE to keep the familiar, well known, highly invested in ENERGY STAR brand in place. Click [here](#) to see the letter by Efficiency First that you can sign if you like.

Once again, as I look back of the months when I didn't think there was anything to talk about... I was wrong. I'll give you a quick intro and then you can go follow the link to the specific Project page for more info on the things you find interesting.

## PREPARING FOR A FRUIT ORCHARD

I don't think I've mentioned it before... one of the ways I justified moving out to the country (having to drive further for hubby to get to work, me to get groceries, etc.) is by turning the acreage into a self-sustaining farm. We haven't gotten very far yet, but I've been taking classes and attending workshops, seminars, conferences, etc. about organic farming methods for the last 5 years. You can learn more about the steps we've taken to get moving toward self-sufficiency by clicking [here](#).

This year we started preparing the soil in the location where we will plant the fruit orchard. It needed roto-tilling because the previous owner ran horses on the pasture and the ground is thoroughly compacted... really not good for growing crops. We then planted organic sweet potato slips in the cleared strips to help break up the soil even further (as they grow and are dug up at harvest time). Check out more details on the Farming project page.

## CEILING FAN WITH HEATER

We actually put this in during the Winter of 2010, but I kept forgetting to add it to the website. So here you go.

The north bedroom on the 2nd floor stays pretty cool, which is great during the summer; but not so great during the winter. Since we don't want to increase the heat in the rest of the house just to accomodate that one room... we opted for a room heater. There are lots of options out there, but one that is relatively unknown: a ceiling fan with a heating unit. I've known about them for years because of my insane obsession with this sustainable building stuff. I was SO excited to be able to buy one!! Click [here](#) for more info about the ceiling fan.

## WOOD STORAGE

Another subject I was supposed to remember to post and forgot all about... good thing I'm adding the blog!! Anyway, I researched how to store wood for the fireplace and found out that it should 1) be off the ground and 2) NOT covered. This way, it doesn't rot because it can dry out... if you cover your wood lot, you can get mold growing in the darkness. Stack it so air can move through it and the outside of the trunk up (if possible) to repel water. We purchased two wood cribs from Kotula's and used treated lumber set on top of some bricks to keep it off the ground. We are very happy with our \$60 investment. We have so many Osage Orange trees to cut back, we have not had to purchase any wood. Plus the Spring storms have added a few unexpected loads to our crib.

## SOUTH PORCH FLOORING

This is probably our slowest project at the moment. It is very time consuming and pretty tough on the hubby's knees and back; so he works on it a little at a time. As of November 11, 2011, half of the floor has been replaced, and another quarter has been removed, but the new boards are not screwed down yet. This means that while it may be completely replaced before winter sets in, it won't be protected until next Spring. I found an eco-friendly product that claims to do a great job cleaning weathered wood before you seal it and am talking with them about being part of the project. I also checked in with Synta and they are still happy to provide the Deck Restore for the job in the Spring. Click [here](#) for more info on the Porch Floor replacement.

## UPDATING OUR HEATING AND COOLING SYSTEM

Home ownership... if it's not one thing, it's another.

This summer (late June), we discovered water on the floor of the basement around/under the hot water heater and furnace. The water heater is pretty old and we have figured we'd need to be replacing it sooner than later, so we assumed that was the reason for the water on the floor. I called the plumber and, luckily for us, they had another job out our way, so they sent their man to our place the same day



I called. He agreed that the water heater was nearing the end... but, lo and behold, it wasn't the reason for the water.

Nope, instead it was the Air Conditioning. Due to low freon, our coil froze and the water was the result of it thawing out. That means we must have a leak somewhere. Unfortunately, we were not in a position to replace the AC or even spend the money to find the leak and have it repaired. So, while it pained me to do it, we had him recharge the system and just had to live with a leak for the time being.

OK, we knew the next BIG project to tackle would be the Heating and Cooling. We were simply hoping to have another couple of years to find the money and/or sponsors. The Project had other plans... find out all about our new Geothermal Heating and Cooling System, [click here](#).

The propane company (Magruder's Propane in Odessa, MO) came and picked up the propane tank. We are officially all-electric now... just a matter of time before we can harvest our electricity from the sun and wind.

## WATER IN THE CRAWLSPACE UNDER THE MASTER BEDROOM

Once again, water informs us of a problem. We discovered the water during Eric's visit; it was by the shut-off valve to the water line that feeds the master bathroom. Couldn't tell how much, but was hoping it was just condensation due to the hot exterior air and cool basement air coming through the opening to the crawlspace. Alas, no. We had standing water over about half of the crawlspace area (mainly at the north end where the garage had ended and the foundation had been extended.

For more on how we cleaned it up, go to the Project page for Plumbing ([click here](#)).

We have had a busy couple of months!

## PLAYHAVEN GREEN BUILDING PROJECT BLOG{UPDATE: JULY 2013: THIS FEATURE HAS BEEN REMOVED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE WEBSITE.}

Since money is tight... EVERYWHERE! ...and since we are not immune to that condition (what with paying for an HVAC system all of a sudden, ouch)... it forced me to figure out how to keep this website worth visiting until the next BIG project. Here's the deal: I get about \$40 a week 'allowance' to play with. Some weeks it goes in with the grocery money, other weeks it's all mine. I'll be posting at least weekly, 'green' tips and projects that anyone can do for little or no money. Some will be projects I do here, others will be things others are doing... but one way or another, I'll be giving you something to think about or do during the long winter days! AND, it will be as a Blog so that you can interact with these postings. I welcome your tips, suggestions, projects. (Please be respectful and don't "troll" it. Any trolling will be removed at my discretion.)

### DECEMBER 3, 2011

I just posted my very first blog. This is a new experience for me, so don't expect TOO much. I welcome your comments and constructive suggestions. (Be nice to me please.) The links to the PHGBP blog are now live! I'll be posting at least weekly.

### DECEMBER 28, 2011

## PHGBP BLOG {UPDATE: JULY 2013: THIS FEATURE HAS BEEN REMOVED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE WEBSITE.}

So far, so good! I decided to start out talking about how to adopt a sustainable lifestyle... in my humble opinion, of course. I've been able to keep to my once a week promise and don't see any reason for that to change. I am excited to have 'Follower' already and in the first month 85+ views. WOOHOO! (Actually, don't know if that is much or not, but it made me happy.) There will be more references between the blog and this web-site as I get into projects to do (or I have done).

I've also switched comments to publish automatically... I want to encourage everyone to add their experiences so we can all learn from each other.

Thanks to everyone who is visiting (both blog and here)... our stats have been climbing consistently and that helps sponsors to 'get on board'.

## SOUTH PORCH

All the old boards are out and the replacement boards are down and fastened. In the Spring we will clean and seal it. I'm still hoping that I can convince the Synta dealers in the KC area to come out and participate in a demonstration of how to apply the Deck Restore to spread the word about the product (and the project). Cross your fingers for me.

## WATER HEATER TIMER

I've added a link to the Intermatic website so you can see all the specs and particulars about the Electric Water Heater Timer that the guys installed when they put in the geothermal system.

## NOVEMBER ELECTRIC BILL

We received our first electric bill showing a full month of activity since installing the geothermal system. It showed that our usage in November was minimally higher than it was in November of 2010. An average of 6 kw per day more. I'll have to see what the weather conditions were for those 2 months to get an accurate interpretation ... but regardless, I'm happy!

## **FEBRUARY 14, 2012**

## PROOF THAT WE'RE REACHING PEOPLE!

The hubby reminded me this weekend that I hadn't posted the email we received about a teacher using the site in conjunction with a class project. Here is her email with some other links the kids found as well. Good Job Kids!!!

(January 4, 2012) Hello there,

My name is Deanna Ryan and I'm a science teacher for some lovely students at Green Mountain School District in Vermont. I hope I'm not a bother, but I just wanted take the time to send you a quick thank you note on behalf of my class and myself for providing the resources on your page. My students just completed a project to learn about the importance of sustainability in and out of the house and your page was a great reference for them, so from all of us, thank you!

As a small token of our appreciation, we thought we'd send along a few other helpful resources that my students actually came across during their research. Figured that since it's such an important topic, the more resources, the merrier :) Here they are:

Recycling 101 - <http://earth911.com/recycling/>

Environmentally Friendly Cars - <http://www.cheapcarinsurance.net/the-environmentally-friendly-car/>

Alternative Energy Sources - [http://istc013.istc.illinois.edu/resources/view\\_cat\\_admin.cfm?id=2](http://istc013.istc.illinois.edu/resources/view_cat_admin.cfm?id=2)

Green Furniture - <http://www.sofasandsectionals.com/green-furniture-guide>

All About Fair Trade - <http://www.ibfx.com/Education/All-About-Fair-Trade>

And if you wouldn't mind adding them alongside your other resources, I'd love to show my students who went above and beyond to find the sites that their work was appreciated (Maybe a little extra credit). Let me know what you think.

Thanks again! Sincerely, Deanna Ryan

PHGBP BLOG {UPDATE: JULY 2013: THIS FEATURE HAS BEEN REMOVED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE WEBSITE.}

A new entry at least once a week is really helping me stretch myself. Now that I've gotten through my initial list of things to talk about, I must choose a topic as it comes to me and as I work on projects. Let's hope that I can keep up to my original goal.

Thanks to everyone who is visiting (the blog, here, Facebook)... our stats have been climbing consistently and that helps sponsors to 'get on board' so we can have more stuff to show you!

### BUGZOOKA™

One of the presents I gave myself for Yule was a BugZooka™! Check it out [here](#).

### NITELITE™

When my parents were here over Thanksgiving, they asked about a night light so they wouldn't have to leave the hall light on (for essential trips in the night, shall we say). Visit the page and learn more.

### PRUNING

Most of the time, our pruning demands require me to use the 'loppers' -- the big pruners for tree limbs -- but winter is the time to trim back the fruit bushes and brambles. So I went looking for my hand pruner and found that the blade was broken. More info on the [Farming](#) page.

## APRIL 27, 2012

Happy Arbor Day! This is a day to honor the miracle of trees by planting some of your own! Here in Missouri the Department of Conservation makes it easy and inexpensive to get seedlings of native plants and trees. The Arbor Day Foundation also provides seedlings as an incentive to become a member.

This Is The First Time I Have Been HAPPY To Do Our Taxes!

I filled out the yearly tax returns for the hubby and myself. I prefer to use TurboTax because it makes my business tax stuff pretty simple. Usually, I dread the whole thing because it means finding papers that I've put in piles and then compiling all the documents and so on. Some years I tackle it as soon as we get all the documents from employers etc. and other years I wait until the last minute.

This year I was not excited about it at all because not only did I have virtually no income from my business, we closed my IRA to pay for the geothermal HVAC system last fall. Thank goodness we had them take the correct amount of taxes (including the penalty) from the IRA disbursement!

Anyway, I knew we would be getting a refund since we have extra taken out of the hubby's check to cover income from my business (net loss this year, wah!). Plus, there is a 30% federal tax credit because of the geothermal HVAC, but I had no idea what a difference it would make on our refund! We were extremely lucky because the credit popped us down into the next lower tax bracket! All totalled, the refund put back into our pocket the amount of penalty we had to pay for early disbursement of the IRA.

When you add all the rebates, tax credits, etc. together, the cost for the whole HVAC switch (including the extra weatherization and added return ducts) ended up being about \$13,000. I'm glad we used the IRA because while it had been invested in renewable energy companies where it was; we used it to invest in renewable energy right here at home and no stock market crash is going to take this investment away. It was a good decision from which we will continue to reap benefits for years.

### THE BEES ARE HERE!

It is official: we are now beekeepers. Check out our experiences on the [Bee](#) page.

## PROJECT LIST PAGE RE-VAMPED

The list was getting a bit unwieldy, so I've divided the Project List into three (3) sections:

RENOVATION OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL BUILDING  
SUSTAINABLE FARMING  
SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

Hopefully, this will make it easier for you to find the Project(s) you are most interested in at any given time.

## A GOOD NIGHT'S REST

We didn't think there would be a large purchase this spring since we got the HVAC system last fall... but, there is! With the tax refund being much larger than we expected, we sat down and made a list of where we want to put that money. My suggestion was to replace the bed which is an innerspring mattress (purchased to replace the previous waterbed when it sprung a leak that couldn't be fixed) over 15 years ago. Luckily, the hubby agreed and it was decided that a new bed is first on the agenda.

Since the hubby likes a firmer bed and I need a softer one, I thought we should swing for a Sleep Number bed so we could both have restful nights. During the course of my research, I discovered how expensive those beds are and decided if we're going to spend that much money, I'm going to buy the natural bed that I would rather have anyway.

I pulled out my latest copy of Natural Home & Garden Magazine (because I have found bed companies in it before) and visited the websites of several companies that sell natural beds. AND I found that we can not only get a natural bed, it can also be set up so that the hubby's side is more firm and my side is more soft. WIN WIN situation.

I wanted to experience the bed before purchasing it and found that Savvy Rest has a dealer in Lawrence Kansas; which is a little over an hour away from us. We went there at our first opportunity and had a wonderful experience learning about the beds and trying different configurations. Diane Gercke, the owner of Eagles' Rest Natural Home is very knowledgeable about her products and we were so impressed with the store, her presence and the products that we decided to purchase the bed from her instead of going back on-line to order it direct.

Everything arrived in a timely manner (it was shipped from Savvy Rest directly to our house) and I will be making a page for it and putting pictures up as soon as we get it all put together and in place. We'll be moving our current bed into the guest room.

I'm so excited! Soon I'll be able to have a good night's rest again... it's been SUCH a long time.

**MAY 17, 2012**

## MORE PICTURES OF THE BEES!

As of today, we are still providing sugar water to the girls. BUT, since they are working hard on the frames in the 2nd hive body, we are A-OK with helping all we can. After all, everyone has said "Feed them for as long as they will drink it." When they stop, we'll stop. Check out our experiences on the Bee page.

## SLEEP IS WONDERFUL!

Our Savvy Rest bed is set up and we are sleeping in it! Can't say enough great stuff about Diane Gercke, the owner of Eagles' Rest Natural Home and her great store in Lawrence, KS. She is our most recent sponsor and you should go check out her merchandise. Say "HELLO" from us. Click here to learn about the bed and see pictures.



## CHICK, CHICK, CHICK..

We were expecting our chicks to arrive sometime during the week beginning Monday, May 14th. BUT, low and behold, they arrived on Saturday, the 12th! Luckily I checked my email on Saturday morning (I don't often do that) and saw the notification of shipment. So I called the Post Office and arranged to meet them at 11:00 a.m. to pick them up. Check out the new page for the Chickens for pictures of the cute little things... they are growing quickly!

**MAY 22, 2012**

## CHICKS ARE BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE BIRDS...

As you may or may not already know... I've had a fear of birds for a long time. SO, the fact that as the chicks grow, they have come to look like regular birds is rather tough on me. So far so good, though. Only the beating of their tiny (yeah right) wings is causing me trouble. Sure hope they start looking like chickens soon. Check out the Chickens page for pictures... they are now 10 days old.

**JUNE 1, 2012**

## THE CHICKENS HAVE LEFT THE BUILDING!

Yes, it's true. At 3 weeks of age, we had had enough of the dust and the (beginnings of) odor and evicted the chicks from the starter/brooder in the basement. But, not to worry! They got an upgrade to the chicken ark. Since the coop area is insulated, we simply converted it (temporarily) to a brooding house. The chicks now have access to pasture and are not sure WHAT the HECK to do about it. They are becoming funny to watch. New pictures on the Chicken page.

## THE SWEET SOUND OF BUZZ

The bees (or "the girls", as the hubby calls them) are off the sugar water and are multiplying like -- well -- like bees! Visit the Bee page for the latest pictures.

## OH CROP! (PUN INTENDED)

In addition to the chickens and bees, we have been planting perennials each year... mainly berry bushes and trees. This year we added more PawPaw seedlings.

After the failure of the potato barrels last year (will try that again another year), we planted red and russet potatoes in a raised bed. They are looking marvelous and I could not resist sharing a few pictures of them with you on the Farming - Raised Beds page.

## SAY "CHEESE!"

We are VERY excited! Eric Kjelshus (the contractor for the Ground Source Heat Pump installation) let us know a few days ago that he WON an award for it! He submitted the project to Contracting Business.com's Quality Home Comfort Award contest (a National Magazine/Contest) and was a WINNER!!

Their professional photographer (Tim Ryan) flew in on Sunday (May 27th) to take photos of our Mechanical Area in addition to a few shots of our Living Room and Meditation Room. Oh, he also took pictures of Eric (guess that makes sense, eh? LOL). I took a couple of pictures of Tim at work; see them on the HVAC page.

There will be an article in the magazine. As soon as I have a link, I will pass it along.

## SWEET DREAMS

A few new pictures of our Natural Bed from Savvy Rest via Eagles' Rest Natural Home. I realized that with the new bed, we needed a couple of nightstands. While I prefer to buy used furniture, the height I was looking for is rather unusual; so I was excited to find that Old Time Pottery in Independence MO had just what I was looking for and I bought them new. Pictures on the Bed - King-size Natural page.

**JUNE 21, 2012**

## HAPPY SUMMER SOLSTICE!

Yes, I know it was yesterday... but better late than never, I say. We were blessed with 1.25 inches of rain overnight. We REALLY needed it. The weather here in Northwest Missouri has been reminiscent of August -- hot and dry!

Thank goodness for the new ground source heat pump! We are having no problem keeping the house cool with it! I set the programmable thermostat for 65 overnight, then it goes to 70 at 7:30 in the morning and then 75 at 2:30 in the afternoon. With the great insulation and tightness of the house, most days the system doesn't have to come on until late afternoon. It's so easy to keep the house at least 15 degrees cooler than the outside temps. We do let the fan run all the time to keep the air circulating in the house. You can see the thermostat for yourself, [click here](#).

## CHICKEN TRACTOR

The chickens are growing very quickly now. They were in the Chicken Ark for 2 weeks and had started to use the roost when we knew it was time to move them to the Chicken Tractor. So, on June 10th, we set up the poultry net fencing (without electricity this time) around both structures and set about capturing each bird to put it in the Tractor. That was a funny thing! A few of the birds found their own way and all we had to do then was open the hatch. They are SO happy in their bigger space with lots more roosts. New pictures on the Chicken page.

## CHICKEN PROCESSING WORKSHOP

The Hubby and I attended a Chicken Processing Workshop put on by Growing Growers on June 16th. A pasture-raised chicken farmer who is part of a coop that shares a mobile processing unit hosted the event. We had the option of processing a chicken (for the cost of the chicken, since we would get to take it home) and so I signed up for me to do that. Came the day and I "chickened out"... but the Hubby was not squeemish and he did the processing of our chicken. I am conflicted about posting the photos from the event; so, for now, I won't. The thing I discovered from the event is that once the chicken is dead, what is left is just meat (with feathers). The chicken is very calm when it is resting upside down in the "killing cone" and the death is quick. What is disturbing is that muscles contract after death making it appear that there is still life. In processing, sanitation is KEY.

## BUSY BEES

We went to our second class on bees on June 2nd. Learned that we have been doing alot of things very well. Also learned about many diseases and problems to watch out for. Since then our girls have been given a honey super to store more honey in and they have not even started to draw comb on the frames. We are concerned and the Hubby is busy trying different suggestions to entice them to use the space. Visit the Bee page for the latest pictures.

## JAPANESE BEETLES

In case you haven't been following our blog or Facebook page, I've added a page under the Farming section about what we are doing to minimize the infestation of Japanese Beetles around here. I hope you get something useful from the information. Visit the page [here](#).

## THERE ARE CATTLE ON OUR PROPERTY!

Have you been following us on Facebook? If so, then you already have heard the story. If not, check out the new page under Farming and find out how we now have 20 cow/calf pairs and 2 bulls on the 10-acre lot we purchased originally.

## ARTICLE ABOUT THE QHCA AND ERIC KJELSHUS

As you probably already heard, we are VERY excited! Eric Kjelshus (the contractor for the Ground Source Heat Pump installation) let us know a few days ago that he WON an award for it! He submitted the project to Contracting Business.com's Quality Home Comfort Award contest (a National Magazine/Contest) and was a WINNER!!

Memorial Day Weekend, their professional photographer (Tim Ryan) flew in to take photos (I took a couple of pictures of Tim at work; see them on the HVAC page). The reporter contacted us a couple weeks ago to get some quotes for the article. Today he (Ron Rajecki) called to say the draft of the article is on it's way for us to see. How exciting this all is! As soon as I have a link to the published article, I will pass it along.

## RECYCLING

There is a new page on the website about Recycling and Repurposing. I don't know how I missed it for so long... after all, I did the blog entry back in December. Anyway, I've copied that entry over and have added a section about Repurposing that I hope you will enjoy. Click [here](#) to get to the Recycling page.

**JULY 4, 2012**

## HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!

We live in the United States of America and today is the day we celebrate the Declaration of Independence from the British Empire in 1776.

Before I lived on a farm, this day meant heading to our family's cabin on the lake (near Bellevue Nebraska) to swim, boat, play, light fireworks and eat foods like hot dogs and hamburgers, potato salad, cucumbers and onions, baked beans, and (of course) watermelon!

When all of us kids moved away and as the folks got older, the cabin became too much so they sold it. But lots of good memories remain!

On the farm it's different because it doesn't matter that the calendar shows the day is a holiday... livestock must be fed and watered, fruits and vegetables don't harvest themselves. So, we'll celebrate the holiday by getting all the chores done as early as possible and then RELAX the rest of the day. I think fireworks seen via the TV sounds good in this heat.

## CHICKENS

The cockerells and pullets are starting to look and sound like chickens! The combs are beginning to form on several of their heads and the boys are getting "cocky".

They all get a bit more freedom starting today. Yes, a sort of Independence Day celebration! The electric poultry net fence is in place and the Chicken Tractor is inside it. While it is still somewhat cool, we are letting them out into the fenced area to catch one at a time and clip a single wing and put a numbered band on the boys. We want to be able to tell which of the boys are more feisty (they get to become broilers first) and which is the most docile (he may get to become a rooster).

I've added some photos of the expansion AND I've added a couple of fun pictures. New pictures on the Chicken page.

## BUSY BEES

Good news and bad news.

The colony is very healthy and all is well in that regard. The girls are “bearding” because of the heat - odd thing to see; check out the pictures.

While the hive was open for inspection (and to figure out why they hadn’t started using the honey super) a crop duster sprayed pesticide on the field across the road and we are sure we have a smaller colony than before; because any bees caught in the spray or overspray will have been killed. Visit the Bee page for the latest pictures.

## THERE ARE STILL CATTLE ON OUR PROPERTY!

They probably won’t be here much longer because 32 cattle (units) on 10 acres will overgraze the grass. But all is well and we’ve enjoyed having them stay with us! I’m hoping to be here and get photos of them catching and loading the cattle. Crossing fingers and toes. Check back (to see if I was lucky) on the page under Farming.

## ARTICLE ABOUT THE QHCA AND ERIC KJELSHUS

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Memorial Day Weekend, their professional photographer (Tim Ryan) flew in to take photos (I took a couple of pictures of Tim at work; see them on the HVAC page). The reporter contacted us a couple weeks ago to get some quotes for the article. He sent us the draft of the article... if it goes to press as written, they used MUCH of the info from this website! What a compliment. How exciting this all is! As soon as I have a link to the published article, I will pass it along.

## AUGUST 3, 2012

## LUGHNASADH

Lughnasadh (Irish: Lúnasa; Scottish Gaelic: Lùnastal; Manx: Luanistyn) is a traditional Gaelic holiday celebrated on August 1st. It originated as a harvest festival. (Info provided from Wikipedia.)

It is my opinion that everyone’s holidays are worth celebrating (any excuse for a party!). We did not have a party for this one, but I mention it because we had the most GLORIOUS full moon this day! All the wildfires (added to the pollution and other airborne particulates), while being devastating make the sky at the horizon very dense and the moon rising goes through a range of unusual colors. Last night’s moonrise was almost as beautiful. Wish I’d had the camera to capture it and share with you.

## CHICKENS

The boys and girls are growing up and are acting like teenage humans with all the bullying, popularity contests, etc. that we associate with that time. I wrote about it on the blog “Chicken High School?”.

We’ve been assuming that the hatchery was able to correctly ‘sex’ (determine the gender of) the chicks and that we had 25 male Dark Cornish and possibly one (1) female (since they sent us an extra). Well, it’s really difficult to tell the sex of chicks and as they have been growing we’ve been watching for the tell-tale signs of their gender. In the last couple of weeks, we have begun to suspect that there are at least two (2) Dark Cornish pullets. Now we are sure there are at least three (3) pullets.



As for whether the Light Brahma and Black Australorps pullets were correctly sexed... so far so good. Since they gave us an extra Australorp, we are wondering if one of them is a male. That one's crown is just a bit more pronounced than the others, but that is not a conclusive factor.

So, this all means that we will be putting a few LESS birds in the freezer. Girls (unlike some human cultures) are given preference because they lay eggs. It also means that my initial Chicken Ark, while it is really nice for 3 or 4 hens, is definitely not going to work for 13 or 14 hens! We truly thought that with our inexperience that we would lose several hens. (Not to jinx it of course.) New pictures on the Chicken page.

## BUSY BEES

The hubby opened the hive to remove the Queen Excluder today. We actually saw one bee trying to go through and it was just every so slightly too big to do so. Which explains why they have not been storing honey in the supers. He also had added another body with frames in between the original 2 hive bodies. They appear to be using it (yeah!). Visit the Bee page for pictures.

## THE CATTLE HAVE LEFT THE PASTURE

We knew they wouldn't be here long, but we did not know how much we would miss them being there. I was lucky to be home when the neighbors came for them so there are a few new photos for you on the Cattle page under Farming.

## LINK TO THE ARTICLE ABOUT THE QHCA AWARD TO ERIC KJELSHUS FOR OUR GEOTHERMAL HVAC INSTALLATION

As you probably already heard, we are VERY excited! Eric Kjelshus (the contractor for the Ground Source Heat Pump installation) let us know that he WON an award for it! He submitted the project to Contracting Business.com's Quality Home Comfort Award contest (a National Magazine/Contest) and was a WINNER!! Here is the link to the article.

**AUGUST 23, 2012**

## THE GLORY OF GEOTHERMAL COOLING!

Here in the Heartland of the USA, we have been experiencing desert-like conditions; but air conditioning our house has not required taking out a second mortgage. In fact, we used 47% of the electricity usage in July 2011 (another way to put that is 53% LESS). Lest you think that could be attributed to something other than improving our structural envelope (insulation) and changing to the ground source heat pump, here are weather comparisons between July 2011 and July 2012. Click here to see the info.

## CHICKENS... COMING DOWN TO THE WIRE FOR THE BOYS

The days are a bit cooler and the chickens are a bit more active. We moved them to new pasture on Sunday night and they had SO MUCH fun chasing all the bugs that thought they were safe (BWAA-HAA-HAA).

I've even found a fun little game to play with (primarily) the boys. First a little preface to the story: the chickens like to eat the downy feathers they molt. OK, so, I was trying to figure out a way to mark the feathers that I don't want to collect rather than keep picking them up and finding them not suitable. So I decided to strip the shaft on the ones I'd rejected. As I was doing this, the chickens made mad grabs for the pieces! Some of the boys actually took them from my fingers.

So, our game is that I walk around looking for feathers and when I find one that I don't want, I strip the shaft and let the feather piece fly in the breeze. The chickens leap and run and peck to get it. They REALLY seem to be enjoying this game and I REALLY enjoy playing it with them.

I took some pictures of them last week so you can see how mature they are getting. I've decided to let the hubby build a "plucker" since I've accumulated so many nice molted feathers. Harvest will probably be a few days after the Labor Day weekend. New pictures on the Chicken page.

### BEES... RAGWEED IS CLOSE TO BLOOMING

Nothing new to report on the bees. We have been told that the last big rush for nectar and pollen is when the ragweed blooms and it sure is growing fast these days. I've seen a few plants with buds. Hoping there is plenty of room in the hive for them to store enough honey et al for this winter. Visit the Bee page for pictures.

### PERENNIAL PASTURE

One of our goals is to change our predominantly cool season grasses and legumes pastures into healthy, perennial, year-round pastures. I've been corresponding with Doug Peterson of the NRCS (Gallatin, MO) about how to do this. I'll be putting up a page with information as it becomes available. Just wanted to give ya'll a "heads-up".

LINK to the Article about the QHCA Award to Eric Kjelshus for our Geothermal HVAC Installation

As you probably already heard, we are VERY excited! Eric Kjelshus (the contractor for the Ground Source Heat Pump installation) let us know that he WON an award for it! He submitted the project to Contracting Business.com's Quality Home Comfort Award contest (a National Magazine/Contest) and was a WINNER!! Here is the link to the article.

**OCTOBER 7, 2012**

### CHICKENS...

Well, there are no longer any male chickens on our farm. They are all now food. The transition from one to the other is something (I think) everyone should experience so they can have a better respect and appreciation for the animals that feed us. We gave those chickens the best life we could and gave them the easiest, quickest death we could as well. They in turn are providing us with nourishment... really tasting, mouth-watering nourishment! We are ever so grateful!

The hens are adjusting to life without the boys. No eggs yet, but there should be soon. New pictures on the Chicken page.

### BEES...

This has been a truly odd year for beekeeping... not just for us but everybody around here. I've updated the page, and I'm thinking it's about time I have the beekeeper submit reports so I don't keep missing details. Visit the Bee page for NEW pictures.

### PERENNIAL PASTURE

So, while I type this, the hubby is driving the tractor to return the manure spreader he borrowed. One of our neighbors has a stable of horses and about six (6) months of green manure in a pile behind the stable. The hubby has made an arrangement to help him get rid of it... spread it on our pastures (that REALLY need it)! Today he has been putting it in areas of the pasture where the cattle were less generous with their own leavings.

We also learned that the grass that flourished after the cattle come off in July is Johnson Grass. In Southern Missouri it is considered a noxious, invasive weed because (while it was brought to the US for the purpose of pasture grazing) it flourishes in warm climates and gets into the rivers and wetlands taking over and crowding out native species.

We are further north where it is less of a problem and when I consulted the NRCS about it, Doug said he'd LOVE to have Johnson Grass in his pasture. So we are HAPPY.

I've also noticed that seed suppliers are advertising forage blends to hunters to draw wildlife to them. The mixes are very close to what has been recommended to us. Isn't that nice!

## A LOCAL RENEWABLE ENERGY GROUP IS COMING TO TOUR

I've been working to get us more exposure and I think the Geothermal installation has started things moving again. The Heartland Renewable Energy Society (HRES), a local affiliate of the American Solar Energy Society, has scheduled a tour for Saturday, November 10th. Here is a link to their website. As soon as I have further info (time, etc.) I'll let you know on our Facebook page, etc.

**OCTOBER 17, 2012**

## CHICKENS...

We moved the flock to their winter home on Sunday morning. 300 feet away and two (2) hours later, everybody is happy with a new supply of bugs!

Do you want the good news or the bad news first? Let's get the bad out of the way. We feel really sad and have to report that we lost one of our hens... the little Dark Cornish girl: #66. Heavy sigh.

The good news is we discovered our first EGG yesterday! New pictures on the Chicken page.

## BEEES...

This has been a truly odd year for beekeeping... not just for us but everybody around here. I've updated the page, and I'm thinking it's about time I have the beekeeper submit reports so I don't keep missing details. Visit the Bee page for NEW pictures.

## GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

This is a phrase I think we are all familiar with... it basically means physically you want to have barriers to keep your stuff from encroaching on their stuff and vice versa. But it also works philosophically in that it's a good idea to maintain boundaries between people.

I bring this up because after one of our neighbor's cattle stayed with us over the summer, our next door neighbor is now interested in using that pasture for their cattle. Hmmm, ummm, well, the trouble is they LIVE NEXT DOOR ... I mean RIGHT next to us -- the 10 acre pasture (lovingly referred to as PlayHaven West) is on the east side of the fence that divides our property from their property.

The other part of this is that they don't want to pay for water, so that would mean opening the fence (putting in a gate) down by their pond so the cattle could come and go to their pond.

And while I was hem-hawing about it before learning this bit about the pond; I was sure it would not be a good idea afterward.

I've copied this section to the blog so that you can comment on it, if you like.

## THEY SAY CHANGE IS GOOD... SOUTH PORCH

What can you rely on? Change. Yep, that's really about all you can rely on... that things change. Yes, you read a bit of frustration in my writing. We have been ready to finish the south porch for MONTHS. I've been corresponding with Synta about getting the Deck Restore ... whether they are still interested (yes), how to get it here, etc. And it has simply been like pulling teeth to get them to (1) respond and (2) actually DO what they finally said they would do. Read more at the South Porch page.

**OCTOBER 24, 2012**

## WHICH CAME FIRST? THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG...

In our paradigm, it was the Chicken! (LOL) We've gotten four (4) eggs, but that appears to be it unless we make the hens think that there is enough daylight to produce more. There's a picture of my 3-eggs sunny-side up breakfast on the Chicken page.

## SOUTH PORCH IS SEALED!!

The weather was not very cooperative, but I got the Earthpaint Rainforest Sealer applied and it looks great! Probably needed another gallon because I was really stretching it out to get it all covered. We'll probably have to sand and seal it again in the early summer, just to be on the safe side. Read more at the South Porch page.

## A LOCAL RENEWABLE ENERGY GROUP IS COMING TO TOUR

I've been working to get us more exposure and I think the Geothermal installation has started things moving again. The Heartland Renewable Energy Society (HRES), a local affiliate of the American Solar Energy Society, has scheduled a tour for Saturday, November 10th. Here is a link to their website. As soon as I have further info (time, etc.) I'll let you know on our Facebook page, etc.

## DECORATED FOR FALL

I promised myself that once the south porch was sealed, I could decorate the outside for the Fall (and Halloween). There are some pictures of the results here.

**NOVEMBER 3, 2012**

## SHEDDING SOME LIGHT TO THE SITUATION

At this point, we are getting one (1) egg almost every day. So obviously we need to make some adjustments to our chicken situation. We've decided to put some light into the Chicken Ark with a timer so that it comes on around 3:00 AM. Everything I've read tells me we need the chickens to have about 12 hours of light and this is the solution most often presented. For the heavy-set birds we have, they recommend 5 watts; so we are getting a string of white LED holiday lights to string in the tip of the "A" and I'll also wind it around the outside so it also lights up the screened area. I'll post the photos soon on the Chicken page.

## SMALL FARM CONFERENCE IN COLUMBIA MO

The last couple of days have been tiring and regenerating for me. I've been attending the National Small Farm Conference put on by Small Farm Today Magazine in Columbia MO at the Fairgrounds. This is the 20th Anniversary and it has lots of great people attending and presenting and exhibiting who think about farming the same way that we do! Even the hubby attended on Thursday and enjoyed it (this was his first time). I attended last year specifically to see a presentation on Pasture Raised Rabbits. This year I'm focusing on the chicken and mob grazing info but have also learned a lot from other presentations and just talking with people. I highly recommend it! Visit the Small Farm Today Magazine Website.

## A LOCAL RENEWABLE ENERGY GROUP IS COMING TO TOUR

As you know (if you've visited recently), I've been working to get us more exposure and I think the Geothermal installation has started things moving again. The Heartland Renewable Energy Society (HRES), a local affiliate of the American Solar Energy Society, has scheduled a tour for Saturday, November 10th from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. Here is a link to their website. Many of the contractors associated with the various projects will be on hand to answer questions.



## CHICKEN COOP LIGHTED

If you've been following along, you'll remember that we decided to put light in the Chicken Ark to encourage the hens to produce eggs even at this time of year. I don't know if doing that started the second hen or if she just 'came of age', but we are now consistently getting 2 eggs just about every day. Yippee! This morning we noticed a different hen 'dancing' around and inside the ark by herself... thinking she is 'coming of age' as well. If this is the trend, pretty soon the eggs will be more numerous and more often!

I took some photos this morning and have posted them with a few fun shots on the Chicken page.

## CHECKING OUT WORSTELL FARMS / GRASS-FED CATTLE

Yesterday, we drove 2-1/2 hours to Worstell Farms in Mexico MO for a farm tour. They have grass-fed cattle and we were interested to see their operation. Robert spent the better part of 3 hours walking us around, talking to us about his set-up, answering our questions, etc. and didn't seem to be annoyed when we interrupted him (too often) trying to guess what he was going to say... a hazard of book learning and lots of excitement about a new venture.

It was a nice surprise that we got to walk in among his herd of Galloway (and crosses) -- Mommas with calves and a Bull. Their attitude was very different from what I experienced with the Angus that were our guests this summer (the Angus were wary and gave off a "stay away" vibe). The Galloways were watchful but welcoming and one heifer calf was especially friendly: licked my fingers and let me scratch her head and withers! The bull watched us casually from a distance. Today the calves are being removed from the cows -- weaning time. We chose a good day to tour!

Thanks SO much, Robert! You can check their website out here: <http://worstellfarms.com/>

One thing every farmer/writer has recommended is visiting other operations and learn from them. So that is one of our goals.

I met Greg Judy (another MO farmer from closer to Columbia) who does this type of grazing very successfully and have been reading one of his books. We also have several books by Joel Salatin and a couple by Jim Gerrish to get through this winter.

We are planning to do High Density Grazing (also known as 'mob' and 'strip grazing') next year with cattle. We'll have to start small and have lots of very small strips since we'll probably only have 2 or 3 cattle. That is OK. It will give us lots of experience moving polywire, configuring grazing spaces, working with water, etc.

## HRES TOUR

The HRES tour last Saturday was great! The contractors who were able to attend gave excellent information and answered a host of question. The group was smaller than I'd hoped, but then I tend to have high expectations. Everyone went home with a small packet and hopefully lots of ideas for their own projects. Here is a link to their website. On the other hand, there has been a distinct increase of visitors to this website, which I am attributing to people taking the tour virtually. Welcome All and Thanks for Stopping By!

## PROCESSING CHICKENS

We are helping friends with processing their chickens. Yes, you read that correctly. Eric Butler (the contractor who did our insulation) and his wife are farming about 10 miles from us and have a batch of broilers ready to process. We know what a job that is and how much we wished we'd had a couple of extra hands to help us. So when we heard last Saturday they were doing it just the 2 of them, we could

not help but offer our assistance. Besides, it's good to help friends and establish mutually beneficial relationships. It could be next year we might be able to coordinate both of our processing chickens the same date and help each other again. Wouldn't that be nice. I'll let you know how I do (LOL).

## DECEMBER 5, 2012

### EGG PRODUCTION 'RAMPS-UP'!

Between the extra light in the Chicken Ark and the girls coming of age (and probably the warm weather), we are seeing a consistent increase in eggs! We figure most girls are laying now because in the last 2-day period we collected 13 eggs.

It takes between 24 and 25 hours for a hen to produce an egg, and young hens don't necessarily lay every day.

We hope to see 7 dozen a week during peak laying season this spring. And, in case you haven't been following along, the girls free-range (within a large electric poultry netted area that we move as they use up pasture) and are fed NO corn and NO soy.

Since we have a limited supply at this time, we are keeping a list of customers and are supplying them as the eggs become available. We are only selling from the farm, so you'll need to be OK with driving out here to pick up your eggs. Contact Bobbi to put your name on the list. We are asking \$2.50 per dozen. We know that is less than the going rate at the grocery store for this kind of egg... for us it's not about 'cashing in', we'll make a small profit and you will have to use fuel to come out to the farm. Here is a quick link to the Chicken page so you can meet the ladies.

### TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A BAD SITUATION

Every cloud has a silver lining and for us, right now, the nasty mortgage/housing debacle that the economy is reeling from is the cloud that allowed us to refinance our property and lower our interest rate by 2% and 1 year... our silver lining.

We bought this property before the bottom fell out, so we were unsure if we would end up being 'backward' on the mortgage. We opted to check out the HARP program through our mortgage holder (J.B. Nutter) and found that we qualified for a very nice, lower interest, no closing costs (and no appraisal needed) refinance. So being 4 years into a 30 year mortgage, we refinanced the balance due with a 25 year mortgage and not only dropped a year of payments, but our monthly mortgage costs dropped as well.

I'm not really bragging, I mention this in case you are wondering if refinancing is worthwhile. We like our mortgage company and did not want to change ... partly because they hold on to servicing our mortgage for the life of it (we don't have to worry about who owns our mortgage because everything is fixed and J.B. Nutter remains our connection regardless). I highly recommend working with a business like J.B. Nutter!

### I KEEP FORGETTING TO TELL YOU...

As you probably will recall, we changed our propane furnace to a geothermal heating and cooling system last fall (2011). Well, I kept forgetting to send in the form that the contractor filled out for the insurance company. It was several months later when I did and a month or so after that we found a check in the mail from the insurance company! What?? It took some investigating, but what we discovered was that by removing the propane type furnace, we reduced the risk on our policy and VIOLA! a rebate/refund of the difference in what the new price of the insurance is from what the old price was for the months that I was slow sending in the form.

I did not even think about the possibility of our insurance costs going down because of the HVAC change. How nice of them to be forthcoming... we would never have missed it! Our insurance is paid through our escrow on the mortgage, so it's rather 'invisible' to us.

See, Geothermal is the way to go for SO many reasons.

## PROCESSING CHICKENS

I promised to let you know how the helping friends process their chickens went, and... (drum roll, please)

There were six (6) of us: the Butlers (Eric and Jen), us, and 2 friends of the Butlers. Eric had processed before and you know about my and the hubby's experience processing (if not, read about it on the Chicken page). They rented another farms' processing kitchen (nice to know that is an option). The hubby and the other guy worked at the killing cones and scalding (NICE scalding! did 4 birds at a time, rotated them in and out for just the right amount of time, NICE), I worked the drum plucker (also plucked 4 birds at a time) and removing any feathers that it didn't, Jen and the other lady did the eviscerating and Eric moved around working wherever needed.

They had around 130 Cornish Cross to process and between collecting the birds, putting them in crates, transporting them and getting the water in the scalding up to temp, it was about 10 a.m. before we were needed to help. We stopped close to 4 p.m. (with a short break for pizza in there somewhere) and figure we processed about 90 chickens. It was a LONG day.

About half-way through the day, I slipped and fell, catching myself (luckily) by the armpit over the sink with my legs sprawled in different directions (over the drain in the eviscerating area). I got rather messy but nothing broken (only my ego). I recently made my way to a massage therapist and then my chiropractor to put my muscles and bones back into alignment from the fall - I feel SO much better.

The Butlers were either going to do the last 40 (or so) birds themselves or take them to the farmer we used to process the rest.

We could have had some chickens as payment for our help, but we would rather exchange one good turn for another. After all, they have a livestock trailer (we don't) and it would be nice if we could borrow it when we get some cows. (Which is OK with them, by the way.) Oh, we did take home a gallon size bag full of gizzards, hearts and livers... they were not going to save them, so we put a container on the table for the ladies to fill instead of throwing them in the waste bucket.

Oddly enough, even with the fall, it was a very pleasant day. There is nothing like being around like-minded people, working and laughing.

## CLEANING CHICKEN GIZZARDS

So I ended up with 14 gizzards from the Butler's chickens. They were not opened or cleaned, so I spent a morning becoming experienced at it. First I went on-line and watched a video and then I just had at it. I discovered that if you slice through the muscle from hole to hole, you can peel the muscle away from the "sack" that holds the undigested food and stones that the chickens eat to help them grind up their food. This way, it is MUCH less messy than cutting all the way through the gizzard and the sack.

After that, I washed the muscle of the gizzard and using a VERY sharp knife, I sliced away the silver/white cartilage that is on the outside and the whitish lining on the inside. Then I cut each piece of the remaining muscle meat into bite size chunks.

All that was left was to cook it! I like gizzards sauteed in butter and garlic... no breading, no frying for me! YUM YUM YUM!!!

## DECEMBER 21, 2012 : HAPPY WINTER SOLSTICE! (ALSO KNOWN AS "YULE")

B-B-B-BRRRR!

Sometimes I really feel for our chickens... e.g. the first night after we put them outside in the 'brooder' converted Chicken Ark there was a major thunderstorm. The most recent reason was yesterday's weather: snow and straight line winds; translation: BLIZZARD. Our girls had experienced winds before but not snow; so when they came out of the Chicken Ark pop hole they did not know WHAT to do! I was able to get one photo before dashing out the door, it is on the Chicken page with more of the story.

## JANUARY 29, 2013

### WINTER CHICKENS

After the blizzard, things calmed down and on New Year's Eve day we had a lovely wet snow fall that yielded about 2 inches. The girls were not happy about the cold snow, but at least it did not freak them out and we shoveled a path from the Chicken Tractor to the Chicken Ark to encourage them to go lay eggs. I've put some new photos on theChicken page,

### EXCITED ABOUT LIGHTBULBS!?!

Yes, it is true: I am excited about lightbulbs! (Is that sad or what? LOL) We are committed to using the latest energy efficient lighting available and so all but one (1) or two (2) of the lightbulbs in our house have been CFLs that we purchased from EFI (in bulk) in 2008. With the advances in LED lighting, I have been waiting for lightbulbs to burn out so I can replace them with LED versions... gee, those CFLs last a long time (ha ha). FINALLY, one of the bulbs in the bathroom fixture (4 bulbs) burned out and I jumped at the chance to replace it with an LED. But, of course, since the fixture uses four (4) bulbs, I simply had to replace them all... at least that was my excuse to buy four (4) of the LEDs.

WOW, those things are BRIGHT! They are rated to the equivalency of 40 watt incandescent bulbs and what is nice to see is that the comparisons are changing from wattage to lumens! Hurray!! Instead of comparing electricity usage (watts) they are comparing lighting (footcandles)... something I am happily surprised has come to pass.

I have a confession. After putting the new bulbs in the master bathroom fixture, I decided to replace them with the extra CFLs (still waiting to be used) stored in the basement. It turns out that the CFLs have a decided plus in that they take a little while to get to full brightness (unlike the LEDs)... probably only an advantage in a master bathroom where a person might need to visit in the middle of the night and likes a gentle illumination to start.

So, I've got 4 LED bulbs that I'm trying to decide which other lights to put them in... that is about the most excitement I want to have right now. (Other than winning the Lottery, of course.)

### SAD NEWS - BEES

We finally had a warm enough day for the hubby to do the winter check on the bees. Sadly, I have to report that they have all died. I am talking photos of his inspection so we have documentation for our mentor when he comes out to investigate the cause. From what we can tell, they had plenty of food, so that was not the problem. More to come when we know more.

The hubby is still set on beekeeping. He is getting two (2) nucs (small hives on frames already) in the spring from a source that promotes natural beekeeping... as in selective breeding of bees that survive mites, etc.

**WINTER -- SPRING -- WINTER -- SPRING... AGH!**

I am not ashamed to say that I was ready to “chuck” the whole enterprise in February! We had 30 inches of snow over a few days (divided between 15, 10 and 5 in that order). Normally, (now that I don’t have to leave the house to get to work) so much snow would not have bothered me since I had previously gone to the grocery store and put vehicles strategically to minimize dig-out. BUT THIS TIME, I had CHICKENS to keep alive AND I was alone due to the hubby being on a business trip. The first big snow was light and dry so the problem was not moving it but walking through it while it was coming down to get food and water to the birds and making sure they had a sheltered spot out of it. We set up the Shelter Logic shed under the assumption that winter storms would hit us from the northwest (as is usual)... but these snows came from the EAST! The winds whipped around and deposited more snow in the south end of the chicken tractor. Plus I’d forgotten to put the tarp over the chicken ark’s hardware cloth (the previous shower curtain having blown off weeks before). So I spent the day trudging back and forth between house, garage, and chickens to be sure the ladies were not covered with snow. Adding insult to injury was that I had driven the hubby to the airport, so I was supposed to pick him up. Panic attack! No way I could clear the 300 foot driveway assuming the road beyond was passable.

Thank Goodness for Wonderful Neighbors!! I called the Osborns (you’ll remember them from their cattle spending July 2012 in our pasture) to see if they knew anyone with a truck and blade that I could hire to clear the driveway. They didn’t have a recommendation but offered to do it with their tractor and blade (if they could get down the road). They WERE able to get to our place and had the driveway cleared between the first and second snow. The hubby in the meantime was delayed on his return due to the weather and arranged for a rental car to drive from the airport to home.

All’s Well that Ends Well -- as the saying goes. The next round of snow was less problematic with the hubby here to help and our wonderful neighbor once again cleared our driveway. This snow was HEAVY and made HUGE drifts. Still out of the east, but with snow drifted around the chicken setup already and a tarp over the chicken ark, they were more protected than before.

I was SO happy that we did not have any other livestock during this winter. I don’t know what I would have done if there were cattle to deal with and no hubby to run the tractor and haul hay and water.

What we learned from this is that we MUST be fully prepared for whatever weather comes our way and this year we were definitely NOT.

I’ve put some new photos on the Chicken page,

**BUSINESS AND TAXES**

We are officially “PlayHaven Farm LLC”! This was recommended to us as a way to protect ourselves. We are adding a rider to the insurance to cover visitors to the farm and also are getting an accountant to be sure we cross our T s and dot our I s. This year I tried to use TurboTax (as usual) but found some of the farm form intimidating... luckily the accountant was great about walking me through it. Next year, we’ll rely on the accountant from the beginning!

After the snow experience (told above), my intention to get a high tunnel has increased 100-fold! Unfortunately, the EQUIP cost-share program available ended for the season before I made that decision so we missed the window of opportunity to get a high tunnel (through them) in time for next winter. The plan being to use it to over-winter the chickens in addition to spring transplants, etc. DRAT and DOUBLE-DRAT!



## EGG-MOBILE AND SOME SAD CHICKEN NEWS

Since we opted to expand the egg production part of the farm, we are building a LARGE mobile chicken coop. You can see the construction on that page ([click here](#)).

We knew the risks going in and so it was not a big surprise... but we had our first Hawk Strike on 3-22-13. Two Red Tail Hawks worked together and were able to catch and kill one of the Black Australorps before we could intervene. The hubby took the carcass down to the farthest end of the farm and left it to whoever wanted it (who knows if it was the hawks or not).

We posted the experience on Facebook and were reminded "that's why they call them 'Chicken Hawks'. Yep, it is... doesn't mean I have to like it. At least the ladies are more alert now... hard lesson to learn. We are down to 11 Hens, but the 50 pullet chicks are due this week and when they come of age in September, we should have plenty of eggs (even in the winter).

## CATTLE

It is official... we are starting our own little herd of cattle this spring. We'll be picking up a young Belted Galloway (unregistered) bull and a steer from Blackwater Bend Farm the end of April. Also, the end of April, we'll be getting two (2) breed-able Galloway-type (meaning crossed from Belted Galloways with Angus and Brahma) heifers from Worstell Farm. The Galloway is a dual purpose breed, but this first little herd is our foray into meat production... dairy will come later.

Once again we are blessed to have friends who are helping us newbees. The Butlers are letting us borrow their vehicle/livestock trailer to get the cattle.

Plus, Mr. Worstell is having us out to his place ahead of getting the girls to give us a tutorial on working cattle. Book learning is good, but hands-on is so much better!

## MARKETING

We sent out our first newsletter this year. You can get your own copy of it by clicking [here](#). The deadline for ordering chickens has passed... but if you are nice to me, I might be able to get your order in on the next batch. So use the order form and contact me (Bobbi).

I plan to revamp the website, so don't be too surprised the next time you visit and it looks different.

**APRIL 22, 2013**

## HAPPY EARTH DAY!

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Every Day is Earth Day to me. It's such a see-saw... one minute I'm seeing the progress we've made convincing people that they NEED to CARE about the decisions they make in relation to the environment; the next I'm seeing the Big Oil/Gas ads that provide inaccurate, misleading messages as facts, Monsanto having more representation in our government than "we, the people" do.... it's frustrating.

It's so simple for me to understand that if we don't consider the air, water, soil and our fellow inhabitants on this planet... humanity will destroy itself. I guess I have longer sight and am able to see the bigger picture... while I revel in the details: the smell of soil, the feel of rain, the sound of wind in the grasses and leaves, the taste of fresh veggies, farm fresh eggs and grass-fed beef, the humorous antics of the critters, the love of my family and friends.

Of course, I also enjoy technology that lets me be connected to distant friends, order products on-line, wash and dry my clothes with energy efficient appliances, watch programs on TV and DVDs, etc. etc. etc. I love beautiful architecture and art, music and the cacophony of city crowds.

I don't think we have to give up one to have the other. Humans are smart, inventive, ingenious... we CAN have it all and not destroy ourselves and the glorious natural world from whence we come. We just have to put more effort into quality and compassion and less into greed and consumption.

Climbing off my soapbox now.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE POOP / CATTLE

We are now Graziers! Feeding the teaming masses of micro-organisms and aiding the symbiotic culture that makes the soil fertile and plants grow. If you don't know what I'm talking about, check out the blog about Soil Health and/or search for Allan Savory and his TED Talk on Desertification.

The cattle are a tool to stimulate grass growth... in turn the grass feeds the cattle and the cattle will feed us. So we are happy to announce that we are the proud caretakers of four Belted Galloway (and crosses) cattle.

I've put photos on the Cattle page of us going to get our little herd.

## CHICKEN NEWS

The Hens are doing well and producing about 6 dozen eggs a week now that the weather turned warm (except of course this week we have freeze warnings, agh). We moved them last week, a few days earlier than we had planned when we woke to find that the pasture they were in had flooded and created a small pond in front of the Chicken Ark. No, I didn't get any photos - too busy fixing the situation.

Luckily, we had received our order from Premiere One which included 2 (two) new electric poultry fences. So we were able to put up the new fence and shift the Chicken Tractor and Ark while the ladies enjoyed eating the worms coming to the surface due to the water. We herded them into the new pasture and all is well.

The chicks are growing quickly and we hope to have them out in the Chicken Tractor next weekend... about the same time we move the Hens to the EggMobile (still under construction... rain and cattle delays).

**MAY 3, 2013**

## MAY DAY - SNOW DAY??

It is often said about Missouri: If you don't like the weather, wait a few minutes... it will change. Actually, that may be an inaccurate quote, but you get the gist. We have certainly had a change in the weather here! Two days ago it was highs in the 80s and last night it got down in the 30s and STARTED SNOWING! Not just sleet, or hail, but GREAT BIG FLUFFY SNOWFLAKES!! I don't care whether you believe in climate change being created by humanity or if it is just part of the cycles of the Earth... IT IS HAPPENING. Extreme fluctuations, extreme weather events, EXTREMES are the indicators.

Now is not the time to place blame... now is the time to figure out ways to live with this new weather reality and prepare for what comes ahead, which if history repeats itself, -- and it always does -- will be an ice age. Too bad we've used up all those lovely fossil fuels that might have gotten humanity through it... I sure hope we can harness the sun and the earth and all the even lovelier renewable energy fuels to get us through it. Personally, I'd rather not be around for it... so best of luck to all of you who are.

## MOOWERS

Yep, you read that correctly: moowers. As in a combination of Moo (the sound a cow makes) and Mower (the machine that cuts the grass). We have jokingly been calling the cattle, moowers. They are doing a fantastic job of converting the top third of the grass into food and manure, trampling the rest and spreading water from the tank all over the ground. There are new photos on the Cattle page.

## EGGMOBILE, ETC.

We finally have moved the hens to their EggMobile. It wasn't easy on them... they were so stressed that they dropped their egg production in half for the last week. And, of course, the snow yesterday and today did NOT help that. But, they will adapt... they don't really have much choice, and it really IS SO MUCH NICER than the Chicken Ark/Chicken Tractor combination.

The pullet chicks have LEFT THE BUILDING. (I just love any excuse to say that, LOL). They are living in the Chicken Tractor in the hens fenced area so they can get used to each other before we turn them in with the hens. New photos on the Chicken page.

**MAY 11, 2013**

## HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

Even though I did not give birth and we do not have any human kids... I still get the benefits of Mother's Day because we have the 4-legged Newfoundland Dog 'kids'. PLUS, I am the caretaker for the chickens, the farm and the homestead. That's my story and I'm sticking to it!

This year my Mother's Day present is an Electric, Cordless, Self-Propelled Mower. Yes, you read the correctly... no, I am not upset about it: I ASKED FOR IT! I love jewelry and girlee stuff, but when it comes to making me happy... give me something that is in line with my attitudes about energy efficiency, going off-grid, and protecting humanity (et al) by protecting the environment.

My new mower came a couple days ago and I got to use it for the first time today. You can read my review on the Sustainable Living: Yard page ([click here](#)).

## MOOWERS

Jeff and Dianna were here last night with the stuff to spray on the cattle and to have a home-grown chicken dinner. I didn't get any photos and there isn't much to tell about it; except that the hubby did a TERRIFIC job spraying the cattle. He was patient and didn't press them when they freaked out at first. He let them move away and just kept at slowly approaching them and spraying a little more and letting them move away again. It was lovely to watch. You can get to the Cattle page by [clicking here](#).

## EGGMOBILE, ETC.

The pullet chicks are growing quickly. They are telling me they are ready to roam like the hens. So, we are dividing the fenced area so they can come out of the Chicken Tractor and learn to go in and out for the night before we put them into the EggMobile with the hens. This means that they get a wing trimmed so they don't accidentally (or on purpose) fly out of the fenced yard... cuz they would not know how to get back in and that would freak them out. You can get to the Chicken page by [clicking here](#).

**MAY 20, 2013**

## WEATHER

This weekend we heard a sound that we did not recognize right away... it was the Weather Alert. Last year was so odd, we were in something the meteorologists called an 'anti-cyclone' and also experienced extreme drought; so there was no reason for the Alert to 'go-off'.

Well, things are pretty normal again and this is storm season. We are getting rain on a pretty regular basis and, until yesterday, it has been coming down in a nice soaking-in way. Saturday we had .75 inches of rain in about 20 minutes and the ground was already saturated from the .5 inches we had on Friday. We also had Thunderstorms and Tornado Watches all weekend. Which brings me back on topic (LOL)...

Sunday afternoon tested the EggMobile for HIGH WINDS. We were lucky that there were a few breaks in the weather on Sunday... after we had a downpour which included pea-size up to quarter-size hail, there was time to go out and move the hens' waterers and feeders INTO the EggMobile and Chicken Tractor. The forecast said up to 80 mph winds were heading our way and WHAM! Not long after we got the 'hatches battened down', the air pressure dropped suddenly and it sounded like we were inside a drum... I wasn't kidding with that WHAM! comment.

During a severe thunderstorm, we are supposed to stay away from windows, but I couldn't resist watching out the little window in the bathroom to see how the EggMobile and Chicken Tractor would do in the wind. I was also concerned about if and/or where the hens and pullets had taken shelter. During the hail, I could see the Hens under the EggMobile.

I am happy to report GREAT NEWS! The EggMobile and Chicken Tractor stayed right where they are and had no problems at all. In fact, even with the heavy rain being blown almost side-ways, there was no water in the EggMobile. The Chicken Tractor is not water tight (to say the least) and the seed in the feeder did get wet, but the pullets were huddled in the back corner as usual and were nice and cozy out of the rain.

I thought maybe the hens would take cover in the Chicken Tractor with the pullets. So during a break in the weather around 9:00 pm (definitely after dark), I took a lantern with me to close up the mobile coops for the night and saw only pullets in the Chicken Tractor. I decided to open the door to the EggMobile to see if the hens were there and THEY WERE! All present and accounted for (and quite a bit of grumbling about the light).

Nature never ceases to amaze me. People often declaim chickens as being stupid, but they were smart enough to head to their nightly, protected roosts during daylight before the storm's winds blew them away. More proof that we humans need to provide the basics and get out of the way to let natural instincts do what they do best.

## ELECTRIC MOWER

In case you missed the last update, I got to buy an electric mower as a Mother's Day present for myself. Long story short... You can read my review on the Sustainable Living: Yard page ([click here](#)).

## MOOWERS

It's a good thing when there is nothing to report regarding cattle (LOL). All is well and the cattle are growing from eating all that lovely grass (et al) in the pasture. The strip grazing is working nicely and in another couple of weeks they will shift from the pasture at PlayHaven Farm East to the pasture at PlayHaven Farm West. The hubby will open the fence between the two lots and then close it up again... you don't always have to put in a gate.

We aren't sure if Ferny has bred the heifers yet, but we don't think so; that's OK cuz it means the calves will be born later in the Spring (10 months from the time they are bred.) You can get to the Cattle page by [clicking here](#).

## EGGMOBILE, ETC.

As I shared above, 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.

We were laughing at how we now have Hens and 'Mini-Me' hens... a nod to the Austin Powers movies. New photos for you to enjoy. You can get to the Chicken page by clicking [here](#).

## 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. Use the order form and contact me (Bobbi). I'll need to have your information and reserve the birds BEFORE we process them, so don't wait!

**AUGUST 7, 2013**

## SUMMER SOLSTICE

Better late than never they say: Happy Solstice! The beginning of summer brought us a beautiful (if very humid) day and was combined with a tremendous full moon.

This happy blessing allowed us to easily combine the pullets (and replacement chick-pullets) to the hens in the EggMobile. Read about that on the Chicken Page ([click here](#)).

## ELECTRIC MOWER

In case you missed the last update, I bought an electric mower as a Mother's Day present for myself. Long story short... You can read my review AND an update of it on the Sustainable Living: Yard page ([click here](#)).

## MOOWERS

We moved the cattle to PlayHaven West pasture in June and they have been eating their way from the north end to the south end via their daily allotment and they are SO happy!! The tale (pun intended) is on the Cattle page with some new photos. You can get to the Cattle page by clicking [here](#).

## COCKERELL CAMPER

The hubby assisted me in building an updated version of the Chicken Tractor that is lighter and more adapted to the fact that cockerells are small and light (since they are immature) and we remove them for processing when they get to adulthood. I've put photos and more info on that on the Coop Construction page. You can get to the Coop Construction page by clicking [here](#).

## MEAT BIRDS

The 2nd batch of Dark Cornish chicks has been out of the the brooder for three weeks now. They are enjoying the warm weather and so am I... except that I had to watch for TOO much heat while they were in the brooder instead of too much cold. They get fresh, cool water in the early afternoon to help them ward off the heat. They are growing quickly, except there was one little guy that everyone picked



on; so I removed him to a small brooder in the basement for a day where he soon learned it was OK to eat the food and drink the water. I took him back at bedtime and that was the end of him being picked on. He has caught up to the rest of the boys. This batch was also delayed in shipping and two of the batch were dead in the box. One more died a day or two later and one broke his beak when we were moving them out of the brooder (rather than make him die of starvation, we ended his life swiftly); PLUS one of the chicks turned out to be a Sicilian Buttercup pullet (a rare breed that I was able to find a new home for)... so we are short a few birds this batch (that will come out of the number I plan to keep).

Officially, the deadline for ordering meat chickens has passed... but since I did order some extra chicks, I am happy to sell the resulting flavorful, juicy meat birds to you this year. Use the order form and contact me (Bobbi). I'll need to have your information and reserve the birds BEFORE we process them, so don't wait! The first processing date is August 23rd. The second processing date will be in late September.

## WEBSITE

I've finished the revamp of the website... amazing how little time I have to work on it during the Spring and Summer. (Plus I'm finding lovely ways to avoid working on it, LOL.... like drawing with graphite.) The big change has been the masthead and navigation links, but I've also corrected some typos, etc. Let me know if you find a link that doesn't work.

When time allows, I'll be moving the "Blog" back to the website. It's a pain to manage the multiple sites, so I'm gathering everything back to one. Of course, the Facebook page will still be there for quick updates and fun links.

## AUGUST 22, 2013

I realized tonight that the Order Form did not reflect the change of eggs price... so I've updated it. You can get the order form here. (If you see an order form that DOES NOT read "PlayHaven Farm LLC... ", clear your browser 'cache' and download it again. Thank you.)

## SEPTEMBER 26, 2013

### CELL PHONE SIGNAL

It's been two years since we had to replace our cell repeater/amplifier. In that time, the technology has become not only more available but you can shop around for what you want at the best deals! Read about our updated equipment on the LIFESTYLE: Broadband Service page (click here).

### NRCS AND AN EROSION CONTROL STRUCTURE

We are not made of money (as are most people we know in farming... and life, for that matter), so we appreciate the various agencies that our tax dollars fund (and, to get on my soap box for a minute: we SHOULD fund them!). I've attended many workshops, demonstrations etc. put on by the NRCS and Extension (for example) so that I can learn from experts and put their experience to work so I don't have to fail at too many things as I go along this farming adventure.

We looked into several of the programs offered to beginning farmers and while we don't quaiify for most of them, we discovered that the NRCS would come out and tell us if they could help with the erosion we have on our acreage. You can read about that experience on the FARMING: Water page (click here).

## BEES!!

I see that I have neglected to tell you good news... the hubby contacted a bee breeder from Illinois who specializes in Queens that are VSH (Varroa Sensitive Hygiene). Here is a link to the Illinois Queen Bee Initiative to learn about what that means. Basically, these bees are REALLY clean! They keep their hive clear of invaders of all kinds but especially those nasty Varroa mites that are a plague to bees.

The hubby was able to purchase two (2) queens with brood this summer... they arrived in July. So now we have two (2) hives set up and while one seems to be thriving, the other we are concerned about. Cross your fingers and toes (et al) that they get enough stores and numbers of bees to live through this winter. Please and Thanks. Photos will be coming soon.

## MOOWERS

Over the summer, the cattle made their way from the north end of PlayHaven West to the south end. Eating grasses, weeds, tree leaves, etc., converting it into food for themselves (and eventually for us) and all the while distributing lovely urine and ruminated waste all along the way. We are still not sure if Ferny has bred Nike and Button... they keep coming into season so probably not; but we'll leave them together and hope that we don't end up with winter calves. The hubby has taken some new photos. You can get to the Cattle page by clicking [here](#).

## COCKEREL CAMPER

We learned that the dowel rods I chose (1/2 inch) were either not inserted far enough into the cross pieces or were just too light to handle the mass of cockerels that wanted to be on a particular one. This has so far only been an issue with the first batch in the first camper we made. This is basically a reminder to myself to get larger diameter replacement dowel rods for that camper and make sure the are inserted further! You can get to the Coop Construction page by clicking [here](#).

## MEAT BIRDS

The 2nd batch of Dark Cornish cockerels gets processed this weekend. Please join me in praying that their passing is as peaceful as possible with as little pain as possible. It takes about 1-1/2 minutes for a chicken to bleed out and die. When you consider that it takes at least that amount of time to pass an egg every day, these cockerels sure have it easier than our hens do! Levity aside, we are grateful to our cockerels for improving the soil, maintaining a lower insect population and providing us with delicious, nutritious food! Blessed Be.

I've added photos of our processing set-up in case anyone is interested. We welcome assistance! In August, it was 70+ degrees when we started and 90+ by the time we finished... but because we were in the shade of the trees, with a light breeze, it was actually pleasant and we didn't get that nasty 'wet bird' smell in our sinuses. Granted, this is not an activity that makes for great tourism... but I think everyone who eats meat should know what happens before it gets to their table. The first time I saw a chicken die was traumatic... which is why I pray in gratitude for them and ask for your prayers as well. Tomorrow morning is forecast to be lovely weather... Saturday looks like rain, so we may have to delay until Sunday for the last of the processing. Email me if you want to see how we process: it's [bobbie@playhavengreen.com](mailto:bobbie@playhavengreen.com).

Officially, the deadline for ordering meat chickens has passed... but since I did order some extra chicks, I am happy to sell the resulting flavorful, juicy meat birds to you this year. Use the order form and contact me (Bobbi). I'll have to charge sales tax on any chicken sold after the processing this weekend; but I'm OK with that if you want to try one (or more) of these yummy chickens!

## WEBSITE

I've moved the "Blog" back to the website. It's a pain to manage the multiple sites, so I'm gathering everything back to one. Of course, the Facebook page will still be there for quick updates and fun links.

**NOVEMBER 22, 2013**

REMINDER: I realized that the Order Form did not reflect the change of eggs price (effective 7-1-13)... so I updated it. You can get the order form [here](#). (If you see an order form that DOES NOT read "PlayHaven Farm LLC..." , clear your browser 'cache' and download it again. Thank you.)

## BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

Harvest time is EXTREMELY busy on a farm. Between gathering in crops and storing them, getting maintenance stuff done before winter, preparing the over-winter situations for livestock (shelter and water and food) and then the regular daily chores... not much else gets done (at least it doesn't here). So, I apologize for no update since September. Let's see if I can even remember what's eventful or interesting to share with you...

## PUMPKINS!

The biggest thing on my mind is the FREE pumpkins we were able to scrounge after Halloween. Turns out it was a bumper crop of pumpkins and one of the businesses in Blue Springs had LOTS extra that they would have had to pay to get rid of... PlayHaven Farm LLC to the rescue!!

I added the story within 2013 Crops section... look for the [UPDATE] and photos. You can read about it on the [FARMING: Fruits, Vegetables, Herbs](#) page (click here).

## A ROOSTER IN THE HEN HOUSE???

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. You can see the rest of the tail and the rooster pictured on the [chicken](#) page (click here).

## OVERWINTER LIVESTOCK

Last year's multiple 15-inch (plus) snowfalls has had me anxious to get everything ready for winter EARLY this year. Unfortunately, most of those jobs require at least two people and since the hubby works off the farm and travels for his job on occasion, AND there has been lots to do in the fall, AND the weather has been uncooperative... well, let's just say we aren't completely ready yet.

The breed of cattle we chose is especially winter-hardy and they have been putting on their winter coats very nicely. They have minimal needs... grass and/or hay, un-frozen water and some trees to shelter under. The hubby put a warming filament in the water trough which is situated close to the garage so the extension cord can be plugged in. The heavy duty hose is attached to the newly replaced field hydrant (an outdoor 'spigot') and that drains after each filling to keep the hose and hydrant from freezing. So, they are set. We'll need to string some colorful wire along their white electric wire so they can see it in the snow, but that's pretty easy and can wait a bit.

The chickens have their lovely EggMobile and we had started to set up their temporary 'barn' structure (a ShelterLogic 10x20 canopy with 'wing' extensions to give them another six feet on either side). But, alas and alack, it was only partially completed when we had a two-day wind storm with 30 mph winds and 45+ mph gusts that caused a couple of the metal tubing pieces to break and the rivets to

be ripped out of the fabric in several locations. The collapsing of the structure did not hurt any of the hens, thank goodness! Hindsight is 20/20 and I will never again allow myself to give in to the words "I'll make this work somehow" when my gut says "find a better solution".

We've placed an order for the ShelterLogic Garage-In-A-Box, SUV/Truck version (13x20). Upon comparison, we realized just how different the structures for the Canopy and the Garage are. The Garage is like the Shed we used last year and that has been great even through the wind storm. We know that we can get replacement parts for the Canopy and so that is not a total loss; we'll be able to use it for shade and events in the summer on low-wind days.

Cross your fingers and toes that the new chicken shelter arrives before the snow, please and thanks. In the meantime, I've got the chickens' food underneath the EggMobile. It's on a bit of a slope and we had to put one of the wheels up on a block so that side (luckily, the east side) has a higher clearance and the feeders fit under it. We also have an electric warmer for the hens water that is working nicely.

## FARM MAINTENANCE

We knew that our external water source (it's called a 'field hydrant' in these parts... I grew up calling it a pump, but that's something else entirely, I'm told... you might also know it as a 'spigot') had problems and since it is imperative that the livestock have water during the winter, the hubby had replacing it on his 'to-do' list.

During a period when no rain was forecast, he dug a pit around the vertical pipe (about 3 feet out) all the way to and below where the horizontal pipe met it. The horizontal pipe is below the freeze line. He measured the height of the vertical pipe with it's spigot and handle and we headed to Orscheln's in Higginsville to get a replacement. We also stopped at Colonial Nursery in Blue Springs to get 150 lbs of gravel.

With new field hydrant and gravel ready, he turned off the water at the meter and then replaced the old with the new hydrant. He then filled the hole under the bend of the joint (horizontal to vertical pipes) with 50 lbs of gravel. At this point he went back to the meter and turned on the water. After checking for leaks and finding none (YIPPEE), we tested the new hydrant and made sure that when you turn off the water, what is remaining in the pipe drains back down below the freeze line and out of the pipe entirely. Excellent! In went the remaining 100 lbs of gravel around that drain and both the vertical and horizontal pipes before shoveling back in to that pit all the dirt that he had previously removed.

Of course, through out this process, the pipe was kept level through an ingenious use of baling twine and two stakes in the ground outside the pit at about a 90 degree angle with the vertical pipe being the fulcrum. The entire job took one VERY long day for the hubby. Standing ovation delivered by me.

## HARVEST

We ended up with about 50 lbs of sweet potatoes and eight pie pumpkins (among the free pumpkins). Not to mention the berries from earlier in the year.

Since we don't have a root cellar yet, I got to prepare this produce to be frozen. I cleaned the sweet potatoes first and then peeled any bad spots and cut them into small chunks for boiling. When they were soft, I drained and mashed them (adding plenty of butter, the way we like it!). Finally spooning cooled, mashed sweet potatoes into bags with enough for 2 servings and putting those bags into gallon-size bags (4 per bag). I would like to have vacuum sealed it, but that would have been tricky and very messy. (FYI, I had to do 6 large batches.)

The pumpkins were cleaned and the seeds scooped out. Then they were cut into small sections and placed onto cookie sheets to roast in the oven at 275 degrees for about 1-1/2 hours. (There were 3 batches.) Once tender and cooled, I peeled the skin away and mashed the pumpkin meat. Having only

a hand mixer, I did my best to 'puree' the meat. Without adding anything to it, I spooned the pumpkin into bags using the scale to get 16 oz. per bag (enough to make one pie). I did not double bag these because I plan to use them all by the end of the year. I ended up with eight 16 oz. bags from those eight pie pumpkins... no wonder they call them pie pumpkins.

## MOOWERS

We still are not sure that the girls have been bred. We saw Ferny mounting one of them recently and he is having an easier time staying in position, but we did not see... well, let's just say that the important bits did not appear to get where they needed to, shall we? (I'm not entirely sure the age of our readers and I'll leave explanations to their parents.)

They are all certainly enjoying the pumpkins! I hope to have photos up soon... You can get to the Cattle page by clicking [here](#).

## MEAT BIRDS

Processing the 2nd batch of Dark Cornish cockerels went well enough. We had to split it between Friday and Sunday since there was rain on Saturday. A nice little break for us and then a very busy Monday for me. We decided to 'part' most of the birds in that batch because they were smaller than the birds in the first batch (which I found a bit odd). Luckily, most of the birds in the 2nd batch were reserved for us.

Officially, the deadline for ordering meat chickens has passed... but since I did order some extra chicks, I am happy to sell the resulting flavorful, juicy meat birds to you this year. The price for whole or parted chickens (quantity and cut limited) is \$5.00 per pound. This is VERY LOW compared to the healthy food stores' locally-grown, cage-free/ranged chicken, and that is intentional to entice you to try some before the order form for next year comes out. Use the order form and contact me (Bobbi). I'll have to charge sales tax on any of this meat. We don't ship so you'll have to be willing to come to the farm to pick it up.

FYI... all the chicken meat is vacuum packed fresh and THEN it is frozen. So it will store for at least six months in an appropriately cold freezer. You can thaw it in cold water in a few hours or you can thaw it in the refrigerator overnight. It will stay good in the refrigerator in that vacuum packed bag for up to a week after it is thawed. (As a matter of fact, it is recommended to let it sit thawed in the refrigerator for a day or two before cooking ... see that sheet on the chicken page about cooking heritage breed chickens.

## WEBSITE

I've finished the revamp of the website... amazing how little time I have to work on it during the Spring and Summer. (Plus I'm finding lovely ways to avoid working on it, LOL.... like drawing with graphite.) The big change has been the masthead and navigation links, but I've also corrected some typos, etc. Let me know if you find a link that doesn't work.

## DECEMBER 16, 2013

### 2014 ORDER FORM AND NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter and Order Form for Meat Chickens, Egg List, Grass-fed/finished Beef, etc. will be out in late January/early February.

We will have one (1) Belted Galloway steer available for 'cow-pooling' in 2014. This means you become a part owner of the steer and (dependent on how many shares you want) when he is processed, you get your portion of the meat. More details on that will be in the Newsletter that accompanies the 2014 Order Form.



Be sure to figure out how many meat chickens you want to order for the entire year (see the page for Meat Birds for more info on that).

REMINDER: I realized that the Order Form did not reflect the change of eggs price (effective 7-1-13)... so I updated it. You can get the order form here. (If you see an order form that DOES NOT read "PlayHaven Farm LLC... ", clear your browser 'cache' and download it again. Thank you.)

## HAPPY SOLSTICE!

The weather has been very winter-like even though we are officially still in the autumn season. Winter officially starts on the Winter Solstice (December 21)... the shortest daylight of the year. We look forward to longer days and hope that we are fully prepared for cold and snow. Whatever Winter Holiday you celebrate... may it be joyous and warm and may your upcoming year be filled with prosperity, excellent health and good times!

## GARAGE-IN-A-BOX FOR THE CHICKENS

The ShelterLogic Garage-In-A-Box, SUV/Truck version (13x20) arrived! We sent out a request for assistance to put it up, but this is a bad time of year (what with the Holidays) to ask for help at the last minute and it was just the hubby and me putting it up. In spite of the company recommending 3+ people, we were successful in getting it constructed! Granted, it took about eight (8) hours (not including lunch and the trip to the lumber yard) and we are pretty sore... but it's up and ready for the chickens BEFORE any big snow events. Photos soon on the Chicken page.

## MOOWERS

The grass has 'cured' after several freezes and a couple snow days (we've been lucky with no more than an inch or two so far). So you could say that the cattle are gathering their own hay these days. The hubby figures there is another week or two of strip grazing before he opens up the entire 10 acre area for them to go back over and find any more tidbits they missed the first go round. He'd really like to control their access more than that so we have a somewhat even distribution of manure through the winter... so he may divide the 10 acre pasture into multiple large areas... we'll see. Anyway, at that time, we'll start giving them the hay that we put up back in May. The hubby figures there is enough to last into March (and we should certainly be seeing new grass growth by then).

The water heater and new field hydrant combined with making sure the hose drains after each filling is working well (knock on wood, etc.). The cattle are very happy to be getting pumpkins still... the hubby brings one (1) each into the basement overnight for them to thaw and gives them to the cattle in the afternoon of the next day. They go through them very quickly -- yummy!

## HOUSE RENOVATION - THE GREEN WAY

I'll bet you thought we were done working on the house... the 'Green Building Project' part of this website. Nope, it's just that money has been going to pay for getting the farm up and running.

The next project is an interior one of a more decorative nature. The small bathroom off the kitchen got a new ceiling due to water damage from a plumbing leak (see the Plumbing page [update: 5/10/10 for those details). The hubby has been motivated to get the drywall ready for a new paint job and that means he will also be replacing the old vanity with one I bought on sale when we had to have the shower plumbing repaired and put in a new faucet/showerhead. Hopefully, I'll have news and photos soon. (Probably sometime in January or February. LOL)

### GET YOUR 2014 ORDER FORM AND NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter and Order Form for Meat Chickens, Egg List, Grass-fed/finished Beef, etc. will be out in late January/early February. I am happy to be YOUR farmer so long as you are willing to come out to the farm to pick up your food. I do not ship food or live animals. (I do, however, make my way into the Kansas City Metro area on a regular basis and am happy to meet you on the Missouri side [\*to deliver only\*] for a small transport fee.)

You will need to contact me so I can put you on the books to get the Order Form, etc. Do this by emailing Bobbi and include your name, phone number, and city in the email. Use this address: bobbi (put the “at” sign here) playhavengreen (and then the “dot” sign) com. (Don’t you just hate that spammers have made providing an easy link for email nie unto impossible without one of those robotic, fill-in forms?) You can also get the 2013 order form here... it has contact info on it as well.

### HAPPY NEW YEAR, WELCOME 2014!

I hope this finds you healthy, wealthy and wise! (To quote somebody, LOL.)

### POLAR VORTEX - JAN. 5 THRU 7, 2014

As you probably already know, the USA got hit with artic temps and dangerous wind chill this week. A Facebook friend found this excellent article about the Polar Vortex... here is the link.

What a surprise (not)... Warmer Arctic ocean and colder other oceans due to melting ice. We’re seeing the effects of global warming which is climate change. When will the doubters get it... we are beyond the point of no return. Time to figure out how to survive this tempestuous transition between a moderate climate and an ice age climate.

As for our little piece of the Earth... we survived it and are very grateful to everyone who put in good words through prayer or intention for the livestock. The cattle have shelter due to big Juniper trees in a nice hollow and extra hay to help them generate plenty of body heat inside that lovely insulating hide of theirs in addition to water that is kept unfrozen due to a tank heater. The chickens have their insulated EggMobile with the ShelterLogic on the windward side and heated waterer and heat lamp. I opted to keep them in the EggMobile until 1 pm on Sunday (when the temps made it out of the ones) and then all day Monday, finally letting them back out around 10 am on Tuesday when the temps made it back into the tens again. (We even got a few eggs from them during that time.) The hubby added a triple layer of corrugated cardboard (cut from a pumpkin bin) to the bottom of the beehives to minimize that cold air going in that way.

I am very grateful. The cattle were my biggest concern this year; but they obviously know how to deal with the weather and I am humbled by nature. A few new photos on the Cattle Page (click here).

### HOUSE RENOVATION - THE GREEN WAY

I’ll bet you thought we were done working on the house... the ‘Green Building Project’ part of this website. Nope, it’s just that money has been going to pay for getting the farm up and running.

The next project is an interior one of a more decorative nature. The small bathroom off the kitchen got a new ceiling due to water damage from a plumbing leak (see the Plumbing page [update: 5/10/10 for those details). The hubby has been motivated to get the drywall ready for a new paint job and that means he willl also be replacing the old vanity with one I bought on sale when we had to have the shower plumbing repaired and put in a new faucet/showerhead. Hopefully, I’ll have news and photos soon. (Probably sometime in January or February. LOL)

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## EXPANDING EXPOSURE

Now that I’ve experienced a full year in business and figured out a few things, I’m ready to advertise. To that end, I’ve been researching (as you know, one of my favorite things to do!) websites where I can add the farm to get increased exposure to the public. In the past, I’ve had unpleasant results looking for resources relating to my sustainability passion... BUT Not This Time! Wow, usually I feel like I’m surfing in front of the wave (in that valley that doesn’t get you anywhere, paddling fast to stay true); but when it comes to healthy food... I get to ride the wave!

The first site recommended to me was EatWild.com. I was sceptical that we would qualify (imagine that)... but after reading it I was ELATED! Their requirements equal the way this farm operates. And VIOLA! PlayHaven Farm LLC was approved and is now listed on their website. Thanks EatWild.com!

Of course, I’ve known of the Kansas City Food Circle for years and am excited to be able to add my farm to their list.

After that positive experience, I was motivated... here is a list of where you can find us (or will be able to find us once their review process is finished):

- Kansas City Food Circle
- Eat Wild
- Local Harvest -- some good reviews here will help us gain exposure (if you are of a mind to do so, that is).
- Certified Naturally Grown
- Local Meat Milk Eggs
- AgriMissouri

I also became a member of several organizations that I’ve either known of already or found in the above quest.

- Missouri Organic Association
- American Pastured Poultry Producers Association
- Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
- Organic Consumers Association

(I’m putting these links on the ‘Resources/Links’ page as well.)

If you know of any other websites that I should check out, please email me! Do this by emailing Bobbi and include your name, phone number, and city in the email. Use this address: bobbi (put the “at” sign here) playhavengreen (and then the “dot” sign) com. (Don’t you just hate that spammers have made providing an easy link for email nie unto impossible without one of those robotic, fill-in forms?)

## MOOWER MOMMAS

Yes, we are ready to announce that Button and Nike are going to be MOMMAS! They have been bred and are officially no longer heifers. Fernie has done his job and is spending quite a bit of time looking over the fence at our neighbors cows. LOL Too bad for him. If you know anyone who wants to put some Belted Galloway into their herd and doesn’t care that our bull is NOT registered... send them my way! Fernie will REALLY appreciate it!

The hubby’s calculations show we will be watching for calves late in August and sometime in September. YIPPEE!

## OVERWINTERING PASTURED POULTRY

Phew! It took me a couple days, but I just finished setting up the new 2014 page for the Chickens. It starts off with how I go about the overwintering of the hens (and their rooster). There is quite a bit of information and lots of photos, so I hope you enjoy it!

You can still get to the last two (2) year’s information from the new page... I’ve made special links. And, as always, from the Project List page.

## HOUSE RENOVATION - THE GREEN WAY

Well, I’ve been busy with gathering receipts, etc. for taxes and haven’t gotten to the bathroom renovation yet. Hopefully, I’ll be able to do that in February. Cross your fingers and toes for me, will you?

## **FEBRUARY 25, 2014**

## GET YOUR 2014 ORDER FORM AND NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter and Order Form for Meat Chickens, Egg List, Grass-fed/finished Beef, etc. is now available. The deadline to place orders (other than for eggs) is March 15, 2014. Deposits for Meat Birds and/or Beef is required with your order. I accept cash or checks (sorry, no credit cards this year).

You will need to contact me so I can put you on the books to get the Order Form, etc. Do this by emailing me and include your name, phone number, and city in the email. Use this address: bobbi (put the “at” sign here) playhavengreen (and then the “dot” sign) com. (Don’t you just hate that spammers have made providing an easy link for email nie unto impossible without one of those robotic, fill-in forms?)

I am happy to be YOUR farmer so long as you are willing to come out to the farm to pick up your food. I do not ship food or live animals. (I do, however, make my way into the Kansas City Metro area on a regular basis and am happy to meet you on the Missouri side [\*to deliver EGGS only\*] for a small transport fee.)

Remember, farming is primarily SEASONAL. The hens lay eggs all year, so those are available round the calendar. Everything else has to “grow up”, so while you are ordering NOW, you won’t be able to come get them until:

- June for Beef
- August or September (depending on which batch you get in on) for Chicken
- Mid-to-late Summer for fruit, vegetables, etc.

## EXPANDING EXPOSURE

I've decided to have a booth at the Kansas City Food Circle Expo on April 12, 2014 (9:30 am to 2:30 pm) at Penn Valley Community College Gym (3201 SW Trafficway, KCMO). Here is a link to a marketing flyer they put together.

Getting listed at the various websites I told you about last time has ALREADY generated several leads and even better: customers! (To see what they are, go to the Previously page and the January 2014 entry.)

If you know of any other websites that I should check out, please email me! Do this by emailing Bobbi and include your name, phone number, and city in the email. Use this address: bobbi (put the "at" sign here) playhavengreen (and then the "dot" sign) com. (Don't you just hate that spammers have made providing an easy link for email nie unto impossible without one of those robotic, fill-in forms?)

## BAH-HUMBUG-CHICKEN STYLE

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. More of the story on the Chicken page.

## HOUSE RENOVATION - THE GREEN WAY

Still haven't gotten to the bathroom renovation yet. Heavy sigh... need some help around here. Know anyone who wants to come play at the farm? Cross your fingers and toes for me, will you?

## MARCH 31, 2014

### KC FOOD CIRCLE EXPO

I'll be at the Kansas City Food Circle Expo on April 12, 2014 (9:30 am to 2:30 pm) at Penn Valley Community College Gym (3201 SW Trafficway, KCMO). Here is a link to a marketing flyer they put together. Friends tell me the Kansas Expo on March 29 had a record 2,000 attendees and they expect the one in Missouri to get at least that due to the coverage of the Kansas event. Guess I better increase my handout stock. LOL

### ANOTHER POLAR VORTEX IN MARCH... IN LIKE A LION

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 cattle's water was filled up, extra hay put out, and the free choice minerals topped off. The honeybees got 2 inch foam insulation all the way around and on top and a windbreak for the bottom screen. 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.

Our Geothermal (ground source) heat pump called for 'auxilliary heat' during the frigid night and day, but we did NOT flip the circuit that would let the strip heater get electricity and the inside temp of the house stayed at the designated 65 degrees Fahrenheit, WOO HOO!

The cattle had no problem and the bees survived. The only problem I encountered was the chickens. Go to the 2014 Chickens Page for the rest of this story.



## GRASS FED/FINISHED BEEF PAGE

Imagine my surprise when I realized that I had not created a page that tells you lovely visitors about how I am making Grass fed/finished Beef available to you. I HAVE DONE SO! Now, when you click on the cow picture at the top of the page, you go to the "Grass Fed Beef for Sale" page. I've also added a text link at the bottom of the page. You get to the story and photos of our herd from the Beef for Sale page (or by clicking here).

## OPEN HOUSE -- MARCH MADNESS: FARM STYLE

I had the first Open House of the year on Sunday, March 30th. As you may remember, I tried to have one on February 1st but the weather did not cooperate. This time though, the weather DID cooperate. YIPPEE! A lovely, if VERY windy, warm, sunny day.

It was a small but very pleasant gathering and everyone seemed to enjoy watching the chickens and the cattle enjoying themselves as well. I made baked chicken (one batch with salt/pepper, garlic powder and parsley; the other with a smuthering of spices: salt/pepper, garlic powder, sage, thyme, turmeric, paprika and parsley) and gluten-free, dairy-free, soy-free, etc. Aronia berry Muffins (thanks to the Namaste Muffin Mix). Folks brought food to share and we had spiced iced tea (or whatever beverage they wanted to bring).

I plan to do this regularly. Early May is my next goal.

## CLASSES ANYONE??

Thanks to the lovely network of like minded people in the Greater Kansas City area, I have met so many people with so many skills in sustainable food and products. To most of us, it is important to raise each other instead of competing with each other. Everyone has a niche and one farmer will be a better fit for a customer than other farmer will. Sometimes it is just a matter of location and that is OK.

I've been talking with Dotty at Smoky Hills Farm about making some of her classes available here at PlayHaven Farm LLC. You really should check out Dotty's website and all the stuff she does. She is AMAZING. (No, I am NOT getting paid to say that, LOL!) Here is her Facebook page: Smoky Hills Farm.

Contact me if you want to come to the Farm for classes and what you are interested in learning about. I'll keep all ya'll posted when I get any set up.

## HOUSE RENOVATION - THE GREEN WAY

Still haven't gotten to the bathroom renovation yet. Heavy sigh... need some help around here. Know anyone who wants to come play at the farm? Cross your fingers and toes for me, will you?

**APRIL 16, 2014**

## MEAT ACCOUNT ???

Here is a suggestion to help reduce the problem of paying for your yearly amount of meat in two (2) lump payments:

Figure out what you want to buy next time, how much it will cost in total and divide that total by 12. (You may need to buy a freezer, so include that cost as well.) Then, set up a "Meat Account" (I use a savings account at my bank.) into which you put the money you came up with (when you divided by 12) into your Meat Account every month. That way you will have saved enough money to cover your years worth of meat ahead of time and it won't be a big strain on your budget all at once.

## KC FOOD CIRCLE EXPO

The Kansas City Food Circle Expo on April 12, 2014 at Penn Valley Community College Gym was super! Not as heavily attended as the Kansas event a few weeks before, but I was thrilled to meet so many lovely people who are already on the healthy food bandwagon. Amazingly, my little table was the 2nd from the front door... a great location. I was sneaky though, I put out M&Ms to entice people to stop and look at my pictures and hopefully pick up my handout. It certainly worked with the kids! LOL

I also enjoyed chatting with the other exhibitors ahead of the expo and was able to purchase some tomato plants at the end before they were carted away (luckily for me, they still had some).

## AND THEN THERE WERE 55...

Hens, that is. 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 here coop ready but no chickens yet. I spoke up immediately and, viola! the three (3) Light Brahmas have a new home. She came to get them today and 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.

## THE ORCHARD IS BEGUN

Yippee! I now have fruit trees! I've created a page devoted to the Orchard... with photos! You can get to it by clicking [here](#) (or from the Project List page, as always).

## CROPS FOR 2014

There aren't many planted products available for 2014, but there will be Aronia berries, Blackberries and (hopefully) Strawberries and Potatoes. You can find that information on the Fruit/Veggies/Herbs page, [click here](#). I've also made a separate page (like I've done for the Chickens and Cattle) for older information ([click here](#)). You can always find these pages from the Project List as well.

## GRASS FED/FINISHED BEEF PAGE

While I am sold out of Grass fed/finished Beef for 2014, I am getting three (3) Belted Galloway steers to process in 2015 (I don't know when, but probably June 2015). The plan is to pick up the three (3) up the same day that SirLoin goes to the processor. If you want to help me name the new steers, drop me an email with your suggestion. I prefer food-related names.

I've had so much interest in the Grass Fed Beef that I'm considering selling shares early to be sure I have enough for everyone. If you want to buy your 2015 Cowpooling Share before next Spring, I would like to know.

## JUNE 2, 2014

## INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)

When you get into Sustainable Farming, you'll learn about "IPM" or Integrated Pest Management. Basically, this is how to keep your produce and animals from becoming inundated by insects and other damaging pests while using few (or even any) hazardous chemicals in the process. Like most things in a business, it boils down to 'cost efficiency'... how much does it cost to keep from losing your saleable

product. There is much more to it and there are workshops available through your local Extension Agency (among others).

For this farm, the topic is more along the lines of promoting beneficial insects to deal with those undesirable ones. Like many people, I feel that I need to stay out of the way of Nature because it knows better than I about how to keep the balance. I've created a new page devoted to IPM ([click here to go there](#)).

Where this can get tricky is with invasive pests... those critters that don't have a natural predator to keep them in balance because they have come from some other continent (either intentionally or not). The Japanese Beetles is an example. I have come to look at the Japanese Beetle as more of a blessing than a pest, though. You can read about my previous experiences with them and a much more indepth discussion of how I use them on the new IPM page.

### NEW HOMES ALL AROUND...

For the chickens, that is. Spring FINALLY arrived in Missouri and, boy oh boy, were we ready for it and thankful!

I found that on the various pages about chickens, I had been mentioning my brooder and hover and yet, I had not provided you with information or photos of it. That problem is corrected! On the Coop Construction page, you can read about and see the brooder and hover. Plus, the new cover we made for it this year. ([Click here](#))

A great deal of changes happened with a common theme of where the chickens (and turkeys) are now... where their homes are. Read about the new homes of chickens (and turkeys) [here](#).

I've also decided to get some "Freedom Ranger" (a cross of several chicken breeds that are supposed to be fast growers AND good foragers) chicks this year to see if they are worth the cost and effort. They will be my meat chickens for the year since this is an experiment. If you have read my rants before, you'll know I am NOT a fan of the Cornish Cross hybrid that is the standard for meat chicken (because they grow abnormally fast and don't move very much because of that and have health problems). The Freedom Ranger hybrid chicks arrive mid-June and will be ready to process at about the same time as the chicks I got in mid-April. It would be nice to shave off four (4) weeks of feeding and moving birds if they turn out to be good foragers. I'll keep you informed.

### THE ORCHARD IS BEGUN -- UPDATE

I've created a page devoted to the Orchard... with photos! You can get to it by clicking [here](#) (or from the Project List page, as always). UPDATE: The Apricot tree did not survive and Colonial Nursery in Blue Springs MO was true to their word and replaced it at no charge to me. Unfortunately, they were out of the same variety and age, so what I got is younger which means an extra year or two before I'll see fruit (drat). They gave me a credit for the difference. I really like working with those folks. I will change the info on the Apricot soon.

### STRAWBERRIES FOR SALE

Surprisingly, the recently transplanted strawberries are producing LOTS and LOTS of berries! I did not expect to have enough for sale this year, but they are proving me wrong. The variety I have are 'everbearing' which means they should keep producing fruit through June.

I don't have 'official' containers for them... so if you want strawberries, I'll weigh out the amount you want and put them in a zip baggie for you to take them home. I'm selling them for \$5.00/lb this year. CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT to come to the farm to get the strawberries.

You can find that information on the Fruit/Veggies/Herbs page, [click here](#). I've also made a separate page (like I've done for the Chickens and Cattle) for older information ([click here](#)). You can always find these pages from the Project List as well.

## HONEYBEES

I'll bet you thought I'd given up on Honey, didn't you. Well, it's been a tough start... what with the problems beekeepers are having with GMO plants killing their bees and the steep learning curve all new beekeepers go through. The hubby came home with two (2) "nucs" (small hives with queens) in July 2013 and I commented about this in September with a promise of photos. Sorry, didn't mean to mislead you. The good news is that one (1) of the new hives survived the horrible winter.

I've started a new page for 2014 with links back to the original page. The trouble with photographing bees is that the pictures all kinda look the same and I hate to bore you with that. HOWEVER, the hubby has taken a bunch of images and, hopefully, you will find them and his information interesting. Here is the new 2014 page link.

### **JUNE 19, 2014 (UPDATE TO THE UPDATE, LOL)**

## 2015 ORDER FORM IS AVAILABLE!

After a great deal of thinking, I've decided to put the 2015 Order Form on the website NOW. That means you can get a jump on your meat for 2015 by placing your order (with your deposit) anytime between now and the March 1, 2015 deadline. REMEMBER, deposits ARE NOT REFUNDABLE. You are taking the risks with me; therefore, think carefully before you commit to sending in any money (that would be in the form of a check, by the way, do not send cash and I cannot accept credit cards.)

## ONE LESS STEER, BUT THREE NEW BELTED GALLOWAY CALVES

Our first steer (SirLoin) was great about going to the processor on Friday! He had no fear getting into the horse trailer and was only a little anxious leaving it to head into the holding pen at the processor. The USDA rep asked me if he was bottle fed (that's how easily he worked for him). I told him: No, we strip graze and he is used to being moved every day. By the way, before he left the farm, I talked to SirLoin and thanked him for doing such a good job eating grass, irrigating and fertilizing the pasture and providing us (and the other share holders) with such lovely meat/food.

I spoke to the processor on Monday and the hanging weight was 412 lbs. (Which is only 8 lbs lower than our estimate. YIPPEE!!)

After dropping off SirLoin, the hubby and I rode along with a farmer friend who was also purchasing some Belted Galloway calves from a ranch near Neosho, MO: Legacy Ranch Belties. It was nice to be able to share the burden of gas and load everybody into his big stock trailer. We even got a short tour of the herd before heading home.

I've got A BUNCH of photos to go through, so I hope to have those on the Cattle page soon. Sorry it isn't ready right now. [THE PHOTOS ARE NOW ON THE PAGE! [CLICK HERE TO GO THERE.](#)]

I've had so much interest in the Grass Fed Beef that I've decided to start selling shares early to be sure I have enough for everyone. If you want to buy your 2015 Cowpooling Share before next Spring, YOU CAN!

**JULY 19, 2014**

## CHICKEN SHADE STRUCTURE

The ladies really liked the 'outbuildings' (translation: Cockerell Campers) in addition to under the EggMobile for shade and protection, so I created a light-weight roost with cover for them. Pictures and info on the Coop Construction page.

## ONE LITTLE HAPPY FAMILY OF MOOWERS

It didn't take very long. The calves/steers have been accepted and it's interesting to watch the Button and Nike being protective moms and see Fernie being both a friend (playful) and "THE BULL" (letting them know who is in charge). Photos here. I've had so much interest in the Grass Fed Beef that I've decided to start selling shares early to be sure I have enough for everyone. If you want to buy your 2015 Cowpooling Share before next Spring, YOU CAN!

## FREEDOM RANGERS

I'm experimenting with a different type of meat chicken this year. This being an experiment, they will be in my freezer this year. I'll let you know what I decide for next year after I've processed this batch later this summer. Photos of the chicks and my thoughts about them here.

## LOTS AND LOTS OF POULTRY!

In addition to the Freedom Rangers, I have double the number of Dark Cornish from last year and the three (3) test Turkeys. Not to mention the lovely Egg-laying Ladies. The amount of seed they are all going through this year is kind of scary... well, not really, but I do always seem to be buying seed and looking for Non-GMO sources (at least).

There are a bunch of photos on the Chicken 2014 page, for your viewing pleasure. Not to mention the latest news.

## FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

The more I think about it, the more I'm leaning away from the standard produce way of farming. You probably won't see me selling lettuce, tomatoes, etc. anytime soon. Instead I'm pretty sure you'll be able to get perennial fruits and berries in addition to the chicken, eggs, and beef. Especially if I add rabbit and/or other meat animals.

Which is a round about way of telling you that the blackberries are ripe! The hubby is willing to part with some at \$10.00/lb (by weight, not volume... and they don't weigh as much as you'd think). He is freezing them as he picks them, so you'll be getting freshly frozen berries.

The aronia berries look to be ripe in August. If you want some, they are \$7.50/lb (by weight, not volume). You can reserve fresh berries... you need to contact me and tell me how much you want. Otherwise, the aronia berries will also be frozen.

## MY ARTWORK

I am in the process of designing the pages for selling my artwork. I'll let you know when that is ready.

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2014**

## A BIG DECISION...

It's been 2 years now of selling meat chickens. I am grateful for the experiences I've learned in the process and have come to a rather unpleasant decision:

I won't be offering meat chickens for sale in 2015.



Why? The first reason is the processing. Not the actual processing, but the inability to find people to help with it.

The Dark Cornish makes for lovely meat, so long as the birds are not stressed prior to processing; which means no travel to get to a processing facility. As long as we process them On-Farm, we get nice, tender meat.

I am not willing to switch to the Cornish Cross hybrid because if I'm putting chickens on pasture, I want them to BE chickens and scratch, forage and improve the soil with their activity. The Cornish Cross gets so big, so fast, they practically sit in the feeder and barely move. Granted, their muscles are so little used, that even travel stress doesn't make them tough. But that does not make up for the rest of it.

The only thing that might make me change my mind about having Dark Cornish meatbirds in the future is if enough people COMMIT to helping with the processing. That means promising to be here, marking the date in stone, and actually showing up to work. I'm very happy to provide compensation... for example, free chickens comes to mind.

This year, a few people expressed interest but never committed. One nice man committed and then life happened and he couldn't make it (it happens, I understand). So, once again, it was just the hubby and me. It makes for LONG days when it's just the two (2) of us. We really need AT LEAST four (4) people to do this efficiently.

The other reason is the problem of getting customers to come to the farm to get their chickens.

I don't have room to store a bunch of frozen chickens waiting for people to decide when they have time to get their paid-for product. AND, the refrigerator that I DO have, normally stores eggs, so I have to put those eggs in coolers during processing. It holds a limited number of chickens for the dry chill portion of processing so we have to divide the processing up dependent on that number. As soon as the first batch is out of the refrigerator and vacuum packed, the next batch goes in, and so on.

I did not realize how difficult it would be to get people to commit to coming to the farm on a specific date/time. Frankly, it made me very grumpy, cranky and down-right unpleasant to be around. I don't want to be like that.

I don't know how to fix this, so the only thing that might make me change my mind about having Dark Cornish meatbirds in the future is if I figure out a way to fix it.

Suggestions are welcome, by the way, for solutions to either or both problems.

## THE MOOWERS HAVE A NEW ADDITION!

Button had her calf: a boy! It was August 20 sometime just before dawn. The hubby went out to open up the chickens' coops and check on Button and found her "disposing" of the afterbirth. I got out there at 6:30 am and got to see the calf stand up for the first time. More story and Photos here..

Nike is due to deliver in a couple of weeks. Fingers and toes crossed.

## HEN NEWS

Sad news. We lost another hen on August 23rd. The last of the Dark Cornish girls died sometime between egg collection (in the evening) and coop cleaning (that morning). She was a great chicken. I am sorry to see her leave and, yes, I cry over losing her and all the animals.

There are a bunch of photos on the Chicken 2014 page, for your viewing pleasure.

## MY ARTWORK

This summer has been devoted to the farm... no time or energy to work on art. I don't like that problem. I NEED this outlet. Thank goodness for fall and being willing to make changes on the farm.

**NOVEMBER 18, 2014**

Sorry to be two (2) months between Status Reports.

This has been a tough fall for me. Soon after the last update my older Newfoundland Dog girl (Isabeau, turned 10 in October) came down with a limp and that took a bit of time away from the farm to get diagnosed and treated. Long story short, it turned out to be a fast paced growth around her bone on her right rear leg near the hip (we did not do a bioposy, but assume it was cancer). The pain became untreatable and so we did the hardest thing for us and the best thing for her and released her spirit from her body on October 25. Still can't write about it without crying.

Anyway, between that and trying to figure out what to do about meat chickens in 2015... it's taken me this long to get back to the website.

## ABOUT MEAT CHICKENS IN 2015

As you may have read (it's on the Previously page, the 9-12-14 status), I was VERY frustrated by customer interactions regarding the meat chickens this year and had decided to NOT sell meat chickens in 2015 unless I could fix the problems encountered in 2014.

Well, I believe I have come up with solutions that will allow me to continue raising meat chickens.

To purchase meat chickens from PlayHaven Farm requires two (2) commitments in addition to monetary payment:

- Attend and help on at least one (1) processing morning.
- Pick up your vacuum packed chickens at the scheduled date and time.

These are not unusual requests. Many CSA programs require their customers to work on the farm for a set number of hours during the season as part of their commitment to supporting the local farmer; while also requiring the customer pick up their produce at set times and places.

There are no exceptions to these requirements; however, you may send someone else in your place. If you order chickens, but do not fulfill your obligations; you will forfeit your chicken order and any money already paid.

Processing dates and pickup dates will be pre-determined and listed on the order form so that you can choose the date you will help and the date you will pick up.\* They will not be the same date, so you are committing to come to the farm twice: once to help with processing (in the morning) and once to pick up your chickens (in the late afternoon/evening).

\*A limited number of chickens will be processed on each processing date. In the event that the date you have chosen has already been filled by other customers, you will be given the choice of choosing a different date or cancelling your order.

There will be a limit on the total number of Dark Cornish chickens that I will raise... that number is 100 (12 per customer maximum)

The meat chickens can't keep up with the strip-grazing cattle any more (more cattle means quicker movement through the pastures); so they have to rotate around a separate area (while the hens follow the cattle). The pasture needs an average of six (6) weeks to recover before any livestock goes back

into the same location. Therefore, I will have to put the meat chickens on their own area of pasture and limit the number.

On the bright side... in 2015 I can offer Stewing Hens. I'll have about 50 hens (6 per customer maximum) because in 2015 I have to replace the older hens with younger hens. The name tells you how to cook the meat of an older chicken (like in a stew where you cook the meat with wet heat at a low temperature for a longer period of time). All my hens are considered 'heavy' birds, so should be at least five (5) lbs after processing.

### THE MOOWERS HAVE A SECOND ADDITION!

Nike had her calf: a girl! It was September 24 about 8:15 pm. Gary was there to assist her with clearing the sac from it's nose. More story (including how Ferny decided to go traveling) and Photos [here](#).

### AND THEN THERE WERE MORE HENS.

I made an executive decision (easy to do since I'm the only executive, LOL). Since I supplemented the meat chickens with those awful Freedom Rangers (was going to keep them all for myself, but one of my customers was interested in them so I shared) that meant I got to keep a bunch of the Dark Cornish for myself. I already knew that a few were females (it happens even when you ask for all males) so we separated them from the boys before processing and they are happily living with the rest of the hens. I guess there are six (6) or seven (7)... they aren't known for egg laying, but they DO lay eggs. Unhappily, I discovered when we moved the hens to their overwinter pasture that two (2) of the Dark Cornish are NOT hens but are in fact ROOSTERS. OY VEY, here we go again. Well, it must have been meant to be. We'll see how they do with the hens and if they are as rough as the Light Brahma rooster was... into the next processing they will go.

Speaking of the overwinter pasture. The hens are moved just in time for the first cold bought of the season. I've adjusted it some after last winter's experiences.

Also info about feeding Japanese Beetles, the Turkeys and whatever else was on my mind... LOL. Photos and stories on the Chicken page, [here](#).

### MY ARTWORK

Once again, I have to report no progress in this area. Gee that irritates me. BUT, tomorrow is another day (she says optimistically).