

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE FARMING : TURKEYS

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Sustainable Farming : Turkeys" 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.

PASTURED TURKEYS

Anyone who has been visiting and following this adventure of becoming farmers will know about how I ended up with turkeys. For the rest of you though...

In 2014, the hatchery where I purchased my meat bird chickens messed up my order. In an effort to make it up to me, they gave me three (3) turkey poults at no charge. I came home with a White Broad-breasted (commercial breed), a Bronze Broad-breasted (commercial breed), and a Blue Slate (heritage breed).

I raised them with my chicken meat birds on pasture. I didn't think I was ready to get into turkeys, but my experience with these birds changed my mind. I named them (which was a mistake) White, Red and Blue (respectively) -- I'm thinking you can figure out why, LOL. They turned out to all be hens (girls). You can find images of the young turkeys in Chicken Adventures, Vol. 2.

I didn't trim their wings like I do the chickens because I intended to separate them and leave them to their own devices (no electric fence) which could necessitate them flying. They ended up staying with the meat birds until the chickens were processed because Blue was the only turkey who could fly and she would often fly out of the fenced area to find extra tidbits. Strangely enough, she didn't seem to figure out how to fly back in and so she and I developed a routine and relationship. She would make her "wit, wit" call and I would go out, turn off the electricity, lift the fence and she would duck under it to get back to her buddies and the water (after which I turned the electricity back on -- gotta have protection from ground predators). I came to adore her personality and decided to keep her as the start of my turkey breeding stock.

Turkeys take longer to mature than chickens, so the ladies were moved in with the chicken hens (accompanied by the Dark Cornish that were supposed to be boys and turned out to be girls) for the rest of the year.

White and Red were not as personable as Blue, but they were interesting in their own rights. I could not process them on farm after getting to know them. I learned of a new poultry processor in Archie MO via my farm network. So I took them there. And I cried because it's not easy to kill anything you've nurtured. The processor was super and I will use them again. Since I don't feed corn and they ranged, the two (2) commercial turkeys did not get as big as they are expected to. The carcasses weighed in at 8 lbs (White) and 10 lbs (Red).

So, now you have the background regarding my getting into turkeys.

Assuming that all goes well in 2015 getting a flock started, in 2016 I hope to advertise turkeys for sale. I've ordered 15 poults and there is no guarantee what the ratio of males to females will be. I have an adult hen (Blue) and need at least one male to provide her with a mate. I've been looking for an adult tom (male) Blue Slate turkey and have not found one yet. Crossing fingers and toes that there is a male among the poults. This means that there are NO turkeys for sale in 2015.

COOP

The turkeys will have their own mobile coop. It will be quite a bit different from the chicken's shelters because turkeys like to roost up high, preferably in trees. The process of building it with photos is in Coop Construction.

FOOD (FEED)

Raising turkeys on pasture does not mean (unfortunately) that you don't also have to provide them with food (or "feed" as it is commonly known). My turkeys eat insects, some grass and some sand/soil from the pasture and we supply them with small grains (certified organic and non-gmo), mineral supplements and lots and lots of fresh water.

Most (if not all) mainstream feed uses cracked corn as its primary ingredient. As you may or may not already know, I am allergic to corn products of all types... even baking powder plays havoc with my digestive system. And, I have discovered that eggs produced by hens fed a primarily corn feed also give me problems. Lately I've been calling myself the 'Canary in the Corn Mine,' LOL. (For anyone who doesn't get the joke, it refers to the early days of coal mining when the miners would take a singing canary in a cage into the mines with them to detect poisonous gasses. Because it took very little of the gasses to kill the bird, if it stopped singing, the miners would have time to evacuate and then deal with the gasses before it killed them as well.) It is my opinion that many people with egg allergies may actually be reacting to the corn feed, but there is no proof of that (as far as I know). I eat the eggs from my pasture raised hens and have absolutely NO problem with them in any way.

All that information is provided to explain that I feed no corn, soy or wheat products. That means my costs for feed are about double what I would otherwise pay (for certified organic, non-gmo). You get what you pay for and I am providing high quality, healthy, poultry products.

EATING OUR FIRST TURKEY (APRIL 8, 2015)

This isn't about eating turkey for the first time ever... it's about eating the first turkey I raised from a poult (which is what a turkey chick is called).

If you've read any of the rest of the website regarding my animals, you'll already know that it's one thing to nurture an animal, it's another to kill it for your food. If you are a livestock farmer, you have to come to terms with doing BOTH of those things.

So, when it came time to kill the two (2) commercial breed turkeys I had been raising, I found that I just couldn't do it on farm. If that makes me a bad farmer, well, so be it. I simply could not do it myself. I got to know these two (2) individual turkeys and I was simply too close to the situation. I asked among my network of farm friends and was directed to a new processor in Archie MO. Archie is about an hour from my farm and there isn't anyone closer who processes turkeys.

I called and set up an appointment for my turkeys. A week before the date, the processor had a family emergency and we had to push it back a few days. No problem on this end... although that could be a big problem if I had lots of birds and had to make transport arrangements... something to remember for future.

As usual, the night before the appointment the hubby and I closed up the chickens and since the turkeys ALWAYS made us herd them into the mobile coop each night... it was a no-brainer to simply

catch them at that time and have them sleep in the big dog crate that was set up over a tarp in the back of the van. This way, there was no fuss in the morning, I simply had to get into the van and drive to the processor.

The turkeys were quiet on the drive and only seemed stressed when we were actually taking them out of the crate. The nice people were very gentle with the birds and it was only after I pulled out of the parking area that I let myself release my emotions.

I was to go back later in the afternoon to pick up my birds because they had a bunch of other poultry to process that day. I did and picked up shrink wrapped carcasses (with giblets). The turkeys weighed in at 8 (the White) and 10 lbs (the Bronze) after processing. A nice size for just the two (2) of us.



This was the White Broad-breasted Commercial breed turkey hen.

It took less time to cook than the store-bought pastured turkeys I have purchased in the past.

It's a good thing I was basting and testing temperature or I would have REALLY overcooked this bird. Which might be why some people end up with tough, dry turkeys.

I like to baste with red wine... thus the deep brown skin color.

It was delicious! The Bronze Broad-breasted Commercial breed turkey is still in the freezer. I keep forgetting about it -- will be thawing it out soon now that I'm thinking about it. LOL

TURKEYS LIKE TO BE UP (APRIL 8, 2015)

As you will know from reading the Chicken story in 2014, I decided to keep the Blue Slate Heritage Turkey hen that I named "Blue" (creative, aren't I, LOL). I opted NOT to trim her feathers so she would be able to fly as needed. Unlike the commercial breeds, she is light enough to fly in and out of the poultry fenced area. However, she usually doesn't remember how to get back in and I have to go out and lift the fence for her to duck under. I don't really mind. Anyway, here are a couple of images of Blue doing what turkeys appear to like to do best (besides eating):

Roosting up as HIGH as they can find.

The top of these two (2) images was taken in the fall when we moved the female Dark Cornish chickens (which happens even when you order all males) and the turkeys in with the hens.



You can see the White turkey with the Cornish on the roosts under the Shade Structure tarp. But Blue ALWAYS opted for the top bar.

The photo at left is from this winter in the hens over-winter pasture set-up. The poultry fence is on the other side of the permanent fence and Blue (and some of the chickens) figured out early how to get up to the bar of the permanent fence and over into the front yard.

Here is Blue getting ready for the night on the post. Most nights we had to herd her into the EggMobile with the chickens (it was too cold to be alone on a post overnight... not to mention owl bait).

A NEST FOR THE TURKEY (APRIL 8, 2015)

We found the first turkey egg on Sunday, March 29, 2015. And we found a second one as we were preparing to move the Eggmobile out of the winter pasture. Both were under the Eggmobile, but in different places.

I had hoped to make a nest for her before she started laying, but best laid plans and all...

So after the Vet left on Monday, I set about collecting left over wood to use for construction. And in the process, came across a wood plant stand that we had been just using to collect miscellaneous stuff in the garage. It had 4 sides but no front and back and it was about 18 inches tall and 18 inches deep and about 36 inches wide. Perfect! All it needed was a back and a lip on the front and some wheels on the bottom. The hubby made those adjustments and I painted the exterior of the thing over the next couple of days.

On Wednesday, April 1, 2015, I put pine shavings into it and placed the nest into the chicken area just to the west of the Eggmobile aligning it with the southern nests. It is just a bit too tall to slide under the Eggmobile. I watched as the chickens came scurrying over to investigate it and find out if there was food inside it. One by one, they would peck and scratch and climb in and then out... but several at a time in any one of those positions. Finally, Blue (the turkey) decided it was safe to approach the thing and she did not want to climb inside... but she DID shoo the hens away several times.

Later in the day, the hubby discovered another egg under the Eggmobile – not in the Turkey nest. Oh well, she will get the idea when we get the Mobile Turkey Coop built and shift the nest inside that. At that point, she won't be stuck in with the hens any longer. She will have the company of a flock of Blue Slate Turkey poults to mother.

THE FIRST TURKEY EGGS (APRIL 8, 2015)



I thought you would like to see the first five (5) turkey eggs. Blue has been laying them every other day. From what I understand, this is normal in the Spring and then she will only lay one (1) a week, if that much, the rest of the year. These eggs are NOT fertilized because we don't have a male turkey. One of the Dark Cornish Roosters has been trying to court Blue, but she is having none of him. This is the first time either of us (me and the hubby) has had a turkey egg. The shells are SUPER HARD to open. Takes more force to crack and then that membrane is really tough to penetrate.

Had a heck of a time keeping shell out of the eggs (and found a shell in my very first bite... but that was all, thankfully). I only broke one of the yolks in the process of cracking the shells, yeah me. (The other broken yolk happened trying to fish out shell.)

We found the eggs to be very rich. All I added to the eggs was salt, pepper, milk and a touch of nutmeg. We were both full from just those five (5) eggs.



STARTING A TURKEY FLOCK (APRIL 8, 2015)

It's especially difficult to kill an animal whose personality you have come to know. And that is the BIG problem of having only a few of any breed of whatever you raise. When you can pick out animals by site or behaviour, they become individuals and it is much, MUCH more difficult to remember that they are going to be your food eventually. This is why I prefer to have a bunch of chickens that look alike because it is harder to pick one out of the bunch and bond with it.

Having learned the above lesson, I decided that if I was going to raise and sell turkeys for meat; I would have to pick one breed and keep a bunch (like I do with the chickens).

As you may already know, I prefer Heritage breed everything. Animals that were carefully selected and bred to fill a specific need and that could reproduce themselves. There aren't very many breeds of turkeys to choose from and the breed ended up picking me when I decided to keep the Blue Slate hen.

Here is what I have found about the Blue Slate on the internet:

(From: www.Purelypoultry.com) The gorgeous Blue Slate turkeys are a rare and old variety of domestic heritage breed turkeys.

History: As with most birds of a blue color, the breeding and selection necessary to produce Slate Blue turkeys can be a bit confusing. Unlike some varieties of chickens and ducks, though, the Slate Blue Turkey does breed true. In other words, a male and a female Slate Blue will produce Slate Blue Poults. There is only one variety of Slate Blue Turkey, but with two genotypes. A Blue Slate may, in fact, be one of three different colors:

- Slate, which is also called a Splash - a solid, ashy blue with black spots scattered over the body
- Blue - a lighter, solid, grayish-blue all over, with no black spots
- Black - as you might expect - black all over

Slate Blue Turkeys were never bred for commercial purposes, and their development was not recorded. In fact, no one is really sure if this variety was developed in the New World before European contact, in Europe, or in North America after the colonists settled. One theory is that farmers bred for a specific color in order to distinguish their flocks from neighbors' flocks. The APA recognized Slate Blues in the first Standard in 1874, and it is a popular choice for exhibition purposes. More breeders are needed however, to preserve the genetic diversity and survival of the Slate Blue Turkey. Like other heritage turkeys, the Blue Slate will be ready to process around 28 weeks. Colors: The Slate Blue should be either an ashy blue with black spots or a solid, lighter blue with no spots. Hens are generally lighter in color than toms. Shanks and toes are pink; the beak is a horn color; wattles are red, as is the head and throat. Many specimens have a blue area around the eye.

Livestock Conservancy Status: Watch. Standard Weights: Old Tom 33 lbs, Old Hen 18 lbs, Young Tom 23 lbs, Young Hen 14 lbs Classification: American Poultry Association Class: Turkey

(From: www.livestockconservancy.org) The Slate or Blue Slate variety is named for its color, which is solid to ashy blue over the entire body, with or without a few black flecks. It is also called the Blue or Lavender turkey. Hens are lighter in hue than the toms. The head, throat, and wattles are red to bluish white. The beak is horn in color; the eyes are brown; and the beard is black. The shanks and toes are pink. The Standard weight for a young tom is 23 pounds and 14 pounds for a young hen. Since, however, the Slate has not been selected for production attributes, including weight gain, for years, many birds may be smaller than the standard. Careful selection for good health, ability to mate naturally, and production attributes will return this variety to its former stature.

The Slate was accepted by the American Poultry Association in 1874. It has been popular in exhibition circles and is gaining popularity in pastured poultry production. Renewed interest in the biological fitness, survivability, and superior flavor of the Slate has captured consumer interest and created a growing market niche. The Slate is less well documented and more variable in type and color than any other variety. This makes it more challenging to breed consistently than the others. Its production potential today is not known.



So, now you know what I know about my breed of turkey. The poults I purchased arrived on Tuesday, April 7, 2015. I bought 15 and they sent 2 extra (this is normal in live chick shipping due to travel stress mortality). They are very cute and much more friendly than chicks. They also seem to like the camera.

The set-up is the same for the poults as it is for the chicks. I have 120 chicks due to arrive

later this week and that will work fine. I have been assured that mixing chicks from different hatcheries is not going to kill off my chicks. That the problem I had last year was more likely from travel stress. Praying that is true... we will find out, won't we.



The water has a supplement in addition to a little sugar (which brings them back for more -- repetition is GOOD for turkeys, LOL).

Just checking to see how things are going under the hover.



These poults came running to see the camera.

Many songs coming to mind: "I like big butts...", "It's all about that bass..." to name two. LOL

BLUE BECOMES A MOMMA (JULY 28, 2015)

On May 10th, it was time to move the poults to the turkey coop. We captured them relatively easily and used one of the poultry crates to transport them outside. Then we went to the EggMobile and picked up Blue from one of the nests where she has been brooding (not very comfortably -- they are made for chickens, not turkeys). She wasn't thrilled but tolerated being tucked under my arm for the walk.

We had no idea what to expect when the poults met Blue and vice versa. Some hens will kill chicks that are not their own (at least in chickens) -- so I was taking a big chance.

Blue simply paced back and forth looking for a way out. It was just before dark, so we hoped everyone would settle in and ignore each other, at least. The poults found the heat lamp right away.





Blue woke up to find her poults had “hatched” and is being an amazing momma.

We’re leaving the heat lamps on all the time until day temps get back into the 70s.

Even with the heat lamp, a couple of the poults have figured out it is nice to snuggle down under the wings or tail feathers of Blue.

Not sure if you can tell, but there is at least one poult pushing under her from the right side.

One of the poults isn’t doing well... started limping back in the brooder and is having a tough time now. Not sure how long it will be with us. Crossing fingers. (It is in front of the cross board at the bottom of the image at left.)



Pretty self explanatory... everyone nestled in for the night.



POULTS FIRST ‘WALK-ABOUT’ (JULY 28, 2015)

I had set up the turkeys in a separate fenced area. It didn’t take very long for Blue and the poults to tell us they wanted more space. So after only a couple days, we started opening the gate so they could ‘walk-about’ in the fenced yard for a couple of hours.



I was really curious to see how long it would take them to notice the open door.

No time at all! LOL. They were ready to explore immediately (unlike the chicks who are very timid about new things).

Blue already knew her job was to stay with those poults and she was cooing to them the entire time... reminding them where she was, I suppose.

It took a couple of them a little help to figure out where the opening was, but not too long.

No one had any trouble walking on the door.



Also, the turkeys decided the heat lamp was unwanted in favor of snuggling with Blue. She took to laying in the triangle created by the corner bracing by the gate/door. Then all 16 poultlets would figure out how to get under her outstretched wings and fanned tail. Wish I had a photo of THAT, but alas, no.

Update, May 13: The lame turkey poult left us this morning. Thanks to the hubby for doing the kindest, toughest job: releasing a suffering animal from the physical to the spiritual. We knew it was time because Blue had left it and wanted to escort the others out in the fenced pasture.



Turkeys seem to like edges. They immediately go to the fence line and start following it around.

They will walk the interior, but only after they have figured out the borders.

Time for a rest. There are so many different personalities and levels of independence in this group.

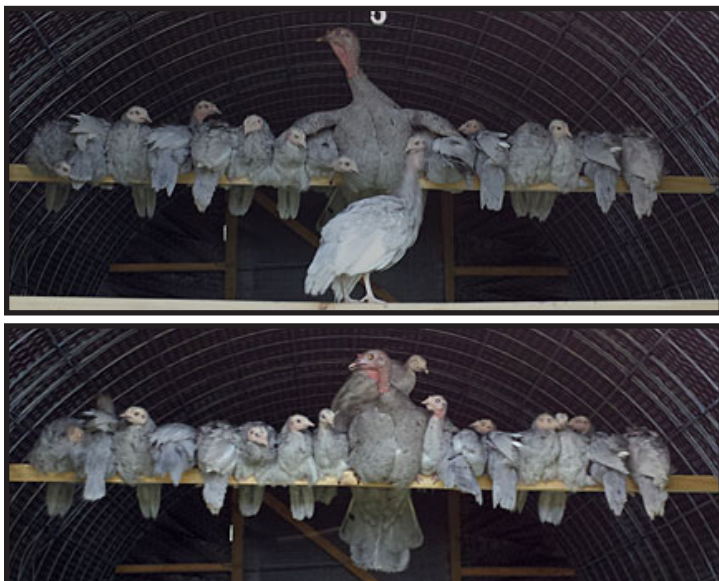
Do you see the poult on top of Blue? and the one trying to be under her?

It was amazing to see the poults flying. A few got to the other side of the fence and Blue was not amused. We helped them figure out how to get back in.

Blue is doing a great job teaching the poults about finding food and heading back to the coop for shelter.



POULTS ROOSTING (JULY 28, 2015)



By the 19th of May the poults had decided that the top roost is THE place to be. LOL

Note that Blue is in the center and there is a poult nestled under each wing in this first image.

Until that last poult decided to join the throng and tried to sleep on top of Blue.

You may not be surprised to find that this upset the order and after this photo there was a whole bunch of shuffling, jumping down and back up.

MORE FUN WITH TURKEYS (JULY 28, 2015)

I am really enjoying the turkeys! It no longer bothers me that they (and some of the chickens) make their way out of the poultry fence to feast on the bounty that the pasture provides (mainly in the form of bugs).

Blue was always with them in the beginning and was very loud when any of them wondered too far away or didn't keep up with the group. It's not usually ALL the turkeys; mostly a group of six (6) or eight (8), but sometimes more and sometimes less. Blue will often go out by herself later in the day... Momma needs some alone time, LOL. Speaking of that, after about three (3) weeks, Blue got amorous with me again. And viola! she started laying a second clutch of eggs. Too bad for her they weren't fertilized.

On this particular morning (June 14), they came across something unusual in the grass.

They are SO curious, but they are also cautious when the situation calls for it.



Viola! a Bull Frog! Can you see it at the right side of the image? Good size frog. No, they did not try to eat it.

The frog was practicing it's stillness exercises. After the turkeys gave up getting it to move, the hubby and I got right down in it's face and it never moved a muscle. We stepped back and soon it hopped away.

Not sure if you can see all the turkeys spread out along the outside of the backyard fence. Lots of stuff in the photo. But the main thing is that turkeys like to be 'up'. There are three (3) on the tubing that keeps the fence corner tight.



After the turkeys have been out on 'walk about' for an hour or two (2), we check on them and usually they are hanging out around the poultry fence waiting for us to come out and open up a section or lift a section so they can make their way back in.

Here is farmer Bobbi (that's me) preparing to lift on the fence to make a gap for the turkey still on the outside (just to the left of the camper).

You may also notice that the turkeys use the campers just as much as the chickens use the turkey coop. All is fair in the search for shade and shelter!

On June 14th, I received my first confirmation that there is AT LEAST two (2) toms in the batch of poults. HURRAY! Actually, we think there are at least five (5), but at the time of this photo, it was just the two (2) displaying themselves.



Eventually (this fall), we will leave the dominant tom to breed with the hens and cull the rest of the toms. We will keep three (3) hens in addition to Blue (at least that is the plan for now).



I decided to keep the turkeys in the same poultry fence as the first batch of chickens because of logistics concerning feeders and waterers. They get along fine. Here you can see the setup.

And a turkey on TOP of the coop! Well, that didn't take long! LOL. We have been watching them attempt to get on top, it has been SO funny! Success!



More photos of turkeys enjoying being 'up'. This was not originally a hitching post, but the leftover of a fence. Now it holds whatever we use it for... in this instance, turkeys!

Every morning we have to check the back yard to be sure there aren't any birds in it before letting out our dog. He wouldn't hurt them -- intentionally -- but he is a Newfoundland Dog and they have really big paws. He likes to chase the birds and has accidentally caught one in the past. So when we see this or a bunch on the ground inside the fence, he has to wait for us to herd them out.



This is what Blue looks like when she is amorous.

It turns out I have to stop stroking her feathers and paying attention to her so that the toms will not see me as a rival.

I broke it off with her a couple days ago. Not that she will understand, LOL. I'm sad, though, because she is so soft and it's nice to pet her.

This photo is VERY recent... July 26th. The hubby normally does the closing up of coops in the evening and the number of turkeys trying to sleep on top of the coop gets larger every night.

He uses one of the posts we have for dividing areas of grass for the cattle (it's a 6-foot stirrup post with a 10-inch spike) to encourage them to get off the top and go inside. Safety first.



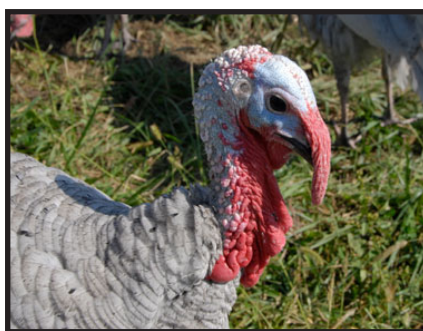
VIDEOS (JULY 28, 2015)

There are videos on the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PlayHavenFarm>

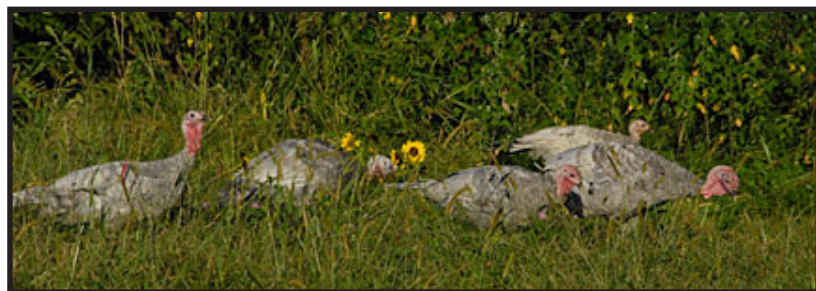
ALL GROWN UP AND WALKABOUT PICTURES (SEPTEMBER 2015)

The turkeys are fully grown now. They love to go on their daily walkabout and control the insect population. I often see them go off in small groups and I think that means the hens are deciding which of the toms they want to claim as their own. The toms are also acting up, posturing mostly; but if a tom gets left inside the fence and one comes back from walkabout, they do fence fight. I have had to untangle a tom from the poultry net fence a few times. Lately, the fighting has increased inside their fenced area. Once I noticed that the original lead tom swallowed his snood... I don't know if that was on purpose or not. Sometime later, it was back to normal. Yes, the fights do get pretty scary and there is some scarring on the toms.

Here are some favorite photos of the grown up turkeys.



Even though their travels make me nervous, they truly enjoy that time... I am happy to trot out to open the fence when they are done and want to go back to their water and chicken friends.



I was able to capture the daily saga of “encouraging” the turkeys to sleep INSIDE the turkey mobile. We had a night when a couple of turkeys ended up sleeping in the tree closest to the house. Luckily, we had already planned to move the chickens and turkeys further away in the field the next day... that was a wise decision and the turkeys opted to be encouraged into the turkey mobile from then on.



Can you see the Dark Cornish in this photo? Sometimes we don't notice that a chicken or two has decided to sleep with the turkeys until opening up the coop in the morning. It's no big deal to us or to them. (Except for the night before chicken processing... then we make sure only turkeys are in the turkey coop.)



A REALLY TOUGH DECISION (OCTOBER 2015)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UPDATE ON POULTRY

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



This is the capture setup we decided to use. We removed the walk-through door first. Then we removed all but the lowest roost that is farthest in. Next came sliding the chicken tractor (with the pophole open) up against the back of the mobile coop so that the door aligned. The hubby strapped the walk-through door in such a way so that it covered the open doorway above the chicken tractor.



Once it was dark, we herded the turkeys into their coop and continued to push them so that they went through it and into the chicken tractor. As soon as they were all inside, we lowered the pop hole and they were secure for the night.

We opened the poultry fence and moved the tractor into position to slide the turkey coop away from the chicken tractor. (After unstrapping the door, of course.)

The hubby also pulled the van with the trailer into position near the chicken tractor to be ready in the early morning. We also put a piece of metal siding on the ground in front of the pophole with the first of the big dog crates ready to receive turkeys. We also practiced how we would slide the piece of wood in between the pophole and the crate, lower the pophole door, slide the crate with the wood over the opening and then remove the wood while closing the crate door in such a way as to keep the turkeys inside the crate; and then reset the next crate et al for the next batch. Once we felt comfortable with the procedure, we left the turkeys to settle in for the night.

In the early pre-dawn, our practice paid off. We opened the pophole and using a couple of posts lowered into the chicken tractor through one of the top doors, the hubby herded the turkeys to the open door. I stood by the crate and once the first group of turkeys were in the crate I slid the wood into place. The hubby closed the top door and together we secured both the chicken tractor and the crate of turkeys. We lifted the crate onto the trailer, put the next crate in place and did the same process until all the turkeys were in crates on the trailer.

We did the turkeys first because we were nervous and wanted to get that out of the way.

Once the turkeys were secure, we drove the trailer over to the EggMobile. Between opening the big doors a small amount while plucking the hens from the roosts easily and the hubby climbing in to pass the rest to me through the small door at the front (after removing the then vacated ladder roosts), we were able to secure the hens (and the Dark Cornish that had escaped the on farm processing) into the chicken crates for transport.

We arrived at the processor on time and I was very emotional as I said a blessing of gratitude over the birds and good-bye. Pickup up of the processed birds was mid-afternoon.

THE LAST UPDATE ON POULTRY (JANUARY 2016)

I have cooked a couple of the turkeys and several of the hens. I was NOT happy with how they were processed. I cannot believe that such shoddy work passes USDA inspection. They would NOT have passed our on-farm quality control. It is understandable for there to be some pin feathers left on the skin, but full size feathers is NOT OK in my books. Plus they removed the skin from the necks and completely cut off the “butts” on ALL the poultry. The livers contained multiple bile sacks which contaminates the contents of the entire container WHICH also contained the hearts. I paid to get the gizzards and there were none. Also, the turkeys were not shrink wrapped like they were last year, they were put in big plastic bags with a zip tie to close them and LOTS of water in the bags making them very heavy and difficult to defrost without a mess. It's a good thing I won't be needing to use that processor again and I certainly won't be recommending them to anyone.

The birds themselves (once properly cleaned) are excellent. The turkeys are exactly as I expect a Heritage Breed Turkey to be, which is to say TASTES AMAZING.