

Five Oaks Beef

Five Oaks Family Farm Monthly Newsletter

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On The Farm...

There are a lot of good things happening on the farm this month!

We're pleased to report that our rotational pasture management approach here at Five Oaks has allowed us to continue to graze our West Pasture well into December! The longer you can keep cattle on pasture going into the winter before you have to start feeding hay and the sooner you can get them back on pasture and off hay in the Spring the better. This is very exciting to us, at two distinct levels.

The first is that being able to graze our cattle into December means that we are managing our pastures better for a more sustainable operation. The second is that hay is one of our single largest expenses, so the shorter the interval during the winter where

you have to feed hay, the better for the bottom line!

As most of you know, we 'work' our cattle several times a year. Sometime in the late autumn or early winter we gather them up and move them, single file, though a chute system that gently restrains them while they are vaccinated and pregnancy checked.



We do the vaccinations ourselves but, for now,

we pay our veterinarian to do the pregnancy checking. We are pleased to report that of the 21 cows/heifers we exposed to a bull last summer, 20 are healthy, happy and pregnant! One of them is healthy and happy, but alas, not pregnant. A 90% conception rate is very good in the industry and we are very excited to have achieved over 95%!

Two cows have already calved and both young heifer calves are healthy

and doing well. We are bottle-feeding one of them out of concern that she wasn't getting enough milk from her mother and was not gaining weight as expected. Insufficient milk is an occasional problem, specially if the mother was a young heifer. Heifers are young females that have never calved and some have trouble producing enough milk.

The real concern with a cow that is not producing enough milk is that the calf may not be able to nurse the required several times within the first couple hours of life to get the necessary colostrum that it must have. There is really no way, after the fact, to know if this calf



received the necessary colostrum or not. More on colostrum in the next article.

We're bottle-feeding the calf twice a day, sometimes three times a day on these very cold days and watching her carefully and hoping for the best. She is growing and putting on weight but still a little thin. Her eyes are bright and she seems to have a lot of energy... so we're pretty hopeful!

Colostrum (or First Milk)...

There is a complex set of events that occur in the cow or heifer and the calf leading up to parturition (calving). In the cow or heifer, the udder begins to fill with colostrum which is sometimes referred to as 'first milk'. The colostrum is a milk base that is super fortified with vitamins and most importantly, the antibodies the calf's immune system will need. All calves are born with non-functioning immune systems. Their immune systems have never been exposed to any pathogens and therefore have never created any of their own antibodies. That's why it is critically important that the calf get the necessary amount (about 2 quarts) of colostrum from it's momma right after birth. The antibodies from momma will protect the calf for the first 6 or 7 months of it's life while it's own immune system is developing.

There is a necessary choreography that must play out for a new born calf to survive and be healthy. First, responding to hormonal triggers, the cow or heifer must begin to produce colostrum. Next the calf is born and drops, headfirst, to the ground. You can think of

the fall to the ground, I imagine, as the bovine equivalent of the doctor slapping the baby's bottom to shock it into breathing. Next the baby must figure out, instinctively, how to get to it's feet and find mommas udder and figure out what to do with it ☺ within a couple of hours because if it can't stand, it can't nurse. If it can't nurse, it will not get the necessary colostrum it needs and it's chances of survival hover somewhere around 50%! The calf's stomach (abomasum) can only accept and benefit from the colostrum for about the first 6 to 8 hours of life. After that, the colostrum has little effect on boosting the calf's immune system.

A New Truck...

Well, sort of new ☺. It's new to us! As I mentioned in last month's Newsletter, we have been searching for a while for a more powerful pickup truck, capable of towing the heavier trailers that we have expanded into. I am pleased to report that we have found a used ¾ ton Chevy 2500 that we believe will work well. Thanks to all of you who gave us leads on finding a truck!



Did You Know...

That cows, unlike women show practically no outward signs of pregnancy, even to the trained eye of an experienced veterinarian. It varies a little among breeds of cattle and the particular genetics of the bull and cow involved but a cow will generally deliver a calf that weighs about 5% of their body weight, or about 60 pounds!

So, where does this 60 pound calf fit in the cow in such a way as to not produce an abdominal bulge as we see in women? Well, the calf is carried on the lower right side of the abdomen. Remember that the rumen (a chamber of the stomach) is on the lower left side. As the calf grows in the uterus the rumen walls are more flexible and giving than the abdominal wall so the growing calf in the uterus occupies some of the rumen space.

What Are They Thinking...

We love producing beef, we love selling it, we love that it tastes great, we love that it's healthy, we love that our customers enjoy it and we love the fact that it is as natural and wholesome as we can make it!

Last week I was very discouraged to read an article in one of my favorite beef industry trade publications about Beef Products, Inc. (BPI). BPI is a South Dakota company that has a patented process to create a beef based 'filler' product that many, if not most, commercial beef producers use to 'extend' their ground beef. Until recently the USDA allowed these commercial beef producers to include up to 25% of BPI's filler, called 'Lean Finely Textured Beef' (LFTB) in their supermarket ground beef product.

Let me tell you a little about BPI's LFTB filler which an ABC News investigative reporter referred to as 'pink slime' in 2013. It started in 2002 when BPI patented a process wherein meat scraps that previously went into pet food and oil could be marketed to humans as Lean Finely Textured Beef. The process starts with actual beef scraps. The beef is then warmed and then 'mechanically separated' from the bone and fat in centrifuges. It is then treated with ammonia to raise the pH and kill bacteria introduced during the warming process!

For more information on the process check out this Wikipedia article: (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beef_Products) on BPI and LFTB.

All of this so far, though concerning, is as they say 'old news'. What was so discouraging to read last week was that the USDA last December responded favorably to a petition from BPI to market their LFTB product as Ground Beef. What used to just be a filler now can be sold as 'Ground Beef'. Yep, packages in supermarkets labeled as Ground Beef may now be 100% LFTB!

Some of you are probably thinking that I bring this up to contrast supermarket ground beef with our Five Oaks Beef 100% natural ground beef and I guess, at some level, I am. We definitely do have a horse (or should that be a cow ☺) in this race but it really does go beyond that. If you took a couple moments to read the Wikipedia article, referenced above, on BPI and

their LFTB product, I don't think you could help but wonder how the USDA could possibly approve a product from a company with such a spotty history.

The bottom line is that the USDA is most likely right, the product will not hurt you. But a better question might be, "is it good for you?". There are many small farms like ours that raise beef conscientiously. If not us, take a look at some of them, specially for ground beef.

Recipe of the Month...

This one is super easy and is my new favorite way to enjoy a great steak in the wintertime! In fact, I like it so much that I'm considering listing our grill on Craigslist and just preparing steaks this way year round! Well... that might be a slight exaggeration! ☺

Butter Basted Steak in Cast Iron Skillet



Ingredients:

- 1 Your favorite steak. I like Ribeyes but even the less expensive Chuck Eyes and Flat Irons turn out really great!
- 6 Tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 Clove garlic, minced

Instructions:

Allow your steak to come to room temperature on the counter. Pat dry with a paper towel and then season liberally on both sides with salt and pepper.

Heat a 12 inch cast iron skillet on medium high heat for a minute or two to get it nice and hot. Add about ½ tablespoon of the butter. It should sizzle and melt very

quickly. Using tongs (never stab your steak) place your steak in the skillet and sear it on both sides. You can peek now and then to decide when to turn it but the searing process should not take more than a couple of minutes.

Once seared, reduce heat to medium, add the remaining butter and the garlic.



Baste the steak with the garlic butter and turn about every minute. Using an instant read thermometer, cook the steak to an internal temperature of about 125-130 degrees as measured in the thickest part of the steak. This should give you a great looking and tasting medium rare steak!

Remove from heat, lightly cover with aluminum foil

and let the steak rest for about 5 minutes. Waiting 5 minutes is the hardest part of the preparation, ☺ but it does give you time to get your baked potato on your plate, sliced open, salted, peppered and buttered!

Beef you can trust!