



Wake Robin

A Family Farm

Summer 2009

When I need to slow down and remember what shaped our small farm dream, I flip through the books that inspired Bruce to quit graduate school and return to farming.

In the words of Wendell Berry, "...character and community - that is, culture in the broadest, richest sense - constitute, just as much as nature, the source of food. Neither nature nor people alone can produce human sustenance, but only the two together, culturally wedded."

Thank you, Wendell Berry, for getting us here, and for inspiring us to keep working to bring the culture back into agriculture!

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Farm Wins Silver Medal for Cheese!

OK, so I know in the last newsletter I said that it isn't our goal to win awards for our cheese, but...

How could we resist participating in the [North American Regional Jersey Cheese Awards](#), when the competition was being held right in Syracuse?!? I think we may have been the only entry to hand deliver our wheel of cheese, and we were definitely the only New York cheesemaker to win an award!

Out of 77 entries from 29 producers, in 15 states and 2 countries (US & Canada), our Mona Lisa cheese scored a silver medal in the Farmstead Hard Cheese category!

We really enjoyed attending the event where the awards were announced, which was held at Sycamore Hill Gardens, in Marcellus. They were serving dinner, but we filled up before the meal on samples of the various cheeses - it was amazing to experience so many cheeses made with Jersey cow milk, all in one place! Bruce was very inspired, and we were honored to have our wheel displayed alongside cheeses from many producers that we admire, like [Cato Corner](#), [Grafton Village](#), and [Consider Bardwell Farm](#).

Next year, there will be a [World Jersey Cheese competition](#), held on the Isle of Jersey, where our cows originated. I'm already working on Bruce, trying to convince him to let me hand deliver a wheel of cheese there!

Free Time on the Farm

What does a farmgirl do when she's not milking cows, making hay, producing yogurt, or selling at market? The answer is, not very much!

Like everyone, I prioritize and make time for the important things. For example, since we need all the young farmers we can get in this country, I participate in things like the [Beginning Farmer Project](#) whenever I'm invited. I'm also concerned about the disappearance of farmland, so I serve on both the [Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board](#), and the [New York Agricultural Land Trust](#) board. From September to June, we add another facet to the business of our lives, as we homeschool our 9 year old son, Hugh (with lots of help from my dad!). This again, is an attempt to invest in the future of agriculture!

What do we do for "entertainment"? Our idea of a great night is having a bunch of farmers over for a local food potluck, which we enjoyed doing last Sunday night. After a year of chipping away at it, our family finished the mosaic table below, and I've been re-reading the books that brought us to a farming lifestyle. The family joke is that Bruce's "hobby" is weight-lifting, since he can often be found juggling 100 pound milk cans. Even after a very tough month of haying in June, we're more committed than ever to our farm, family, and community.



Life Cycle of a Cow

Did you know that a cow goes from calf to mother in about 2 years? In order to explain how that happens, I'll tell the story of one cow family on our farm, beginning with the matriarch, Nora...

Nora joined our herd in the winter of 2006 as a two year old "springing heifer", which means that she was very close to having her calf. Nora gave birth on December 16 - I remember because it was the day of the annual Schader Christmas party, and we were happy to announce to our family that Nora had given birth to a "heifer" (female) calf, who we named Ellen.

Once Nora had Ellen, she became a "fresh cow". Since this was Nora's first calf, she had never been milked with a machine before. She took to it pretty well (unlike some!), and made a good amount of milk in her first lactation.

Since we keep all the heifer calves on our farm, Ellen has been with us since the day she was born. We started breeding Ellen when she was 15 months old, using "AI", or artificial insemination. This means that a friendly technician breeds our cows when they are in heat, instead of a Jersey bull. Cows come into "heat" every 3 weeks, give or take a few days. We use a breeding calendar to help us keep track of when to keep an eye on who, which can be a challenge!

Luckily, we got Ellen bred on our second try. We knew this for sure when the vet came out to the farm with his ultrasound machine, and did a "preg check" on her. Our breeding chart helped us to figure out when to expect Ellen's calf, and she came right on time (even though we never quite believe it, the chart hasn't lied to us yet!).

Ellen gave birth to a bouncy little heifer, Jan, on January 20 of this year. Ellen had to learn the ropes in the milking area, and like Nora, she's been a pleasant, dependable cow ever since!

In order to keep the milk flowing year round on our farm, this life cycle is constantly in motion, with each of our 19 breeding age cows in a different phase every month. Nora has already had another calf, and we are happy to report that Ellen was bred back right on schedule, two months after she had Jan. We will continue to milk Ellen until the end of October, when we will "dry" her off, giving her about 2 months of rest and relaxation before she is going to calve again - she's due on Christmas day this year.

Already, only 3 years into this dairy adventure, we have a few mother/ daughter pairs in the milking herd, and we look forward to 2011, when Nora, Ellen and Jan will become our first family milking trio! Here's a shot of Nora with her granddaughter:



Hello and Goodbye

Our delivery person extraordinaire for the past year, Amanda, recently started working at one of the stores we sell to, the [Syracuse Real Food Co-op](#). We are very proud of her, and we send her off knowing that she will continue to promote local food in her new position as Membership Services director at the co-op. Amanda will always hold a special place on our farm as our very first employee, and since she is still my cousin and the proud parent of one of our cows, she promises to visit the farm often.

Thankfully, we found her replacement just in the nick of time, and we didn't have to look very far either! Our across the street neighbor, Dawn Simpson, will now be driving our big blue delivery truck. Dawn views this new job as an adventure - she loves to meet new people and see different places, so please give her a friendly welcome if you see her out and about!

Your Farmers,

Bruce & Meg Schader
[Wake Robin Farm](#)

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