

2014 Late October Update and Hog Handling

**From:** Tom Barthel

**Sent:** Thursday, October 23, 2014 9:33 PM

**To:** Tom Barthel <Snakeriverfarmer@gmail.com>

**Subject:** Late October Update, and Hog Handling

**Dear Friends, Neighbors and Customers**

One delightful day after another.

This is the most pleasant and beautiful fall in decades.

Actually, four decades. The fall of 1974 was this grand.

**Delivery**

I am making at least one metro delivery trip each week.

Drop offs in Albertville, Maple Grove and Andover.

If you can, pick up your order in Foley, great.

If not, email me AFTER your order is ready.

**Cancellations & orders**

This is a minor thing but I believe it causes some of you stress.

On average, I get one cancellation or order reduction per week. If the change comes before the animal is harvested, it is not a problem.

It concerns me that the person who is making the cancellation is often under stress before they do so.

Don't be. I have Waitlists for everything. Do not agonize over a cancellation. Just tell me.

No explanation required.

**Hog handling.**

I hauled the first eleven hogs to Quality Meats today.

A couple weeks ago, there was an article in a farm magazine about loading hogs.

It was a light article. The author, a woman, commented on how loading the pigs was always associated with a lot of yelling, squealing, shouting, hitting, electrocuting, and swearing.

Afterward, she wrote there was a time of apologies for lost tempers etc.

I think many people have had similar experiences.

It is not like that here.

I prepare the hogs for low stress handling from the day they arrive in the spring.

It is not a big job. It just takes planning and preparation.

It is important to understand the nature of the animals.

This winter when there is more time, I may write in detail about raising and handling hogs. I think there is a need.

For now, you should know that last fall I hauled ten loads of your pigs, over 100 of them, and never had to yell, hit or shock them once.

This morning, because it was the first load, I was a little anxious. I went out at 6:30. Most of the animals were already in the trailer.

I moved some gates and then there were 15 in the trailer.

I walked four smaller ones off the trailer, one at a time.

They can grow for a few more weeks.

I locked the trailer and switched around a few gates.

I returned to the house at 6:51. Twenty one minutes after I had gone out.

The hogs went back to sleep.

I had time for a cup of coffee and some computer work.

At 7:30 the hogs and I drove off to Foley.

As you know, I pasture harvest bison and beef animals.

That is a no stress death for them.

Hogs are different. It is less stressful for them to be together and to meet their end in Quality Meat's facility.

Perhaps I will explain that in more detail in another article.

### **Bourbon Red turkeys on Facebook.**

Last week I posted some photos of the turkeys on Facebook.

**Link to our Facebook page.**

[Snake River Farm Minnesota on Facebook](#)

You could go there to see them, but I know some of you do not use Facebook.

Below is the text that went with the turkey photos.

**Photo #1.** Bourbon Reds are a heritage breed of turkey developed in Bourbon County Kentucky in the late 1800's. Bourbon Reds are known for superior flavor and the ability to do well under "free range" conditions. They are much smaller and less meaty than the common "broad breasted" turkeys. They are able to fly reasonably well and prefer to roost in trees as wild turkeys do. The great majority of turkeys sold in grocery stores are of the broad breasted type. Broad breasted turkeys, as their name implies, were selectively bred for incredible meatiness. Their breasts, formerly flight muscles, are so enormous that they can neither fly nor breed normally. Broad breasted turkeys exist in two colors, "bronze" and "white." Bronze turkeys are essentially the same plumage as wild turkeys. Broad Breasted "Whites" have white feathers and fewer feathers to ease machine plucking.

This year we raised 20 Bourbon Red turkeys. They will be harvested in mid-November. In time to help with Thanksgiving dinners. The Bourbons are significantly smaller than broad breasted turkeys at harvest time. Five to 10 pounds versus 15 to 30 pounds for the broad breasted.

By the way, Bourbon whiskey, a corn based liquor, was named after Bourbon County where it was originally produced.

**Photo #2.** I wanted to get a photo of the Bourbon Red turkeys in display. I was unable to do so. Each time I approached them with a camera they were distracted hoping for food.

Granddaughter Ella simply gobbled to them. The Tom turkeys thought they heard a female turkey. They immediately went into display. Gail took the photos. I asked Ella how she knew such a fine turkey call. She replied, "Grandpa, I have been around this farm all my life." All seven years.

### **A Dutch Belted calf was born this week.**

I posted a couple photos on Facebook tonight.

Below is the text that went with the calf photos.

### **Photo #1. Dutch Belted Cow with One Day-old Calf.**

Each spring I buy almost 100 beef calves and yearlings to raise and finish on grass. The animals I select are hard to find. Those animals come from many small farms in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. I buy only females (heifers) because they finish better, younger and smaller than males. These heifers are

supposed to be “open,” which means not pregnant. Nevertheless, for reasons you can imagine, each year we have one or more unexpected pregnancies. A black heifer calved in summer. This Dutch heifer calved yesterday, and a brown heifer will give birth in November.

When a heifer produces a live calf, that event changes it from a heifer to a cow. That fact also takes the cow out of the fall harvest lineup. The calf effectively adds a year or two to the cow’s life.

We over-winter the cow-calf pairs and use them to calm and train the new arrivals.

When I bring young animals home in the spring, those animals have experienced several very stressful days. Finding a calm cow and calf in their new home relaxes the new animals incredibly. Instantly they have leadership. The young heifers observe the cow to learn where to find water and grass. Young animals watch their leaders to learn which plants to eat. They also take cues on how to behave toward me and to come when I call.

#### **About Dutch Belted Cattle.**

This breed is hundreds of years old. The breed originated in Switzerland. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, animals were taken to Belgium. There they were selectively bred to have the striking white belt. The Belted animals were originally selected for dairy. In recent decades, the US breed has been selected for beef production. They do extremely well on a grass only diet.

This young cow, like all bovine mothers, is on high alert with its new calf. Notice that her ears are listening intently. The day after calving, she moved from the herd in an open pasture to this secluded spot in the lowland.

She is a good mother. She and the calf will do well.

Tom

#### **Photo #2. Gail with the new calf in the prairie.**

The cow had hidden the calf in this grass. When the calf is ordered to hide, it will often allow a person to approach and touch it. If the grass is thicker, it can be quite difficult to locate a calf that will not move. The next morning the cow moved with the calf to a more protected place in the low pasture.

Best regards.

Tom

p.s. Email me if you have questions about your order.