

2015 Late February Letter

On Thu, Feb 26, 2015 at 10:48 AM, Tom Barthel <tbarthel@clarus-medical.com> wrote:

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Customers

We had a very nice Winter Farm Day Saturday. The turnout was light, about 60 of you came.

I blame that on the weather man mostly.

Judging by the forecast, anyone who ventured out Saturday was to be frozen solid, instantly.

We do not pay much attention to weather predictions here.

In any case Saturday was an excellent winter day.

Sunny and bright.

Not cold at all except when bobsledding back from the bison pasture, against the wind.

Most trips I stayed in the pines or close to the woods.

I posted some photos by friend Teresa Marrone on our facebook page.

Link to our Facebook page.

[Snake River Farm Minnesota on Facebook](#)

Teresa is an author and artist with a facebook page of her own.

[Teresa Marrone | Facebook](#)

The upside of a low turnout is that we can spend more time with those who do come.

What a great group.

The next Winter Farm Day is March 7th.

I will send details next week.

Last week I spent two days in a **Soil Summit** at Arrowwood in Alexandria. This annual event is organized by the Sustainable Farming Association.

I find these seminars terrifically helpful and motivating.

This Soil Summit is the best.

The revolution in soil science and the new understanding of soil biology is astonishing.

The speakers are farmers and scientists who are leading the way. People who are actually doing things.

The audience is several hundred farmers like myself.

These are farmers who are on board and applying the new techniques on their land.

New techniques that follow the ways of Mother Nature.

The meeting structure allows us to speak directly with the experts.

For example, Gabe Brown is perhaps the best known soil innovator in the country.

He farms several thousand acres near Bismarck.

Each winter I am able to chat with Gabe and get his advice on very specific issues.

On a similar note, the Acres USA magazine came yesterday.

This edition was focused on pastured poultry.

Joel Salatin had a lengthy article on the subject.

Joel farms in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Gail and I visited his farm last winter.

Joel claims to be America's best known farmer. I believe he is. Gabe is running a good second.

It was Joel who talked me into raising hogs on pasture about ten years ago.

These two farmers, and many others are proving that we can rebuild our soils and that animals have a key role in that reclamation.

This stuff has profound meaning not just for individual human health and nutrition but for topics ranging from animal welfare to sustainable life on this planet.

There is a long way to go of course.

If you drive through the Midwest you will pass countless acres of continuous corn and soy bean fields.

Almost all of these fields are managed in unsustainable and fundamentally toxic ways. Almost all of the meat consumed in the US is raised in ways that you and I consider less than humane. The crucial point is that there are much better ways to farm. Gabe Brown, Joel Salatin and many others can prove it. Google these guys if you want to learn more.

This coming weekend I am off to address the Wisconsin Bison Association. The meeting is in Bonduel, Wisconsin. Ever heard of it? Me neither. It is near Green Bay. MapQuest says a five hour drive. I like long drives. Time to think.

I am tardy in writing about what I am learning regarding meat and cooking this winter.

Sorry. I just need more days and hours. Culinologist (that is on her business card), May Jane Miller told me that brining is good for all poultry, not just Thanksgiving Turkey. Definitely brine whole poultry like chickens, ducks and geese. In fact she recommends it for red meat both beef and pork. Try it. Google for countless recipes. She also is a strong proponent of brazing. Brazing is essentially any slow cooking method that keeps the meat covered and moist. She says cooking roasts until the "gristle" becomes edible is most tasteful and nutritious.

Famous Chef, Jan Emmanuel, told me that all chefs know the most used muscles have the best taste. For example, he considers the tenderloin, which is most tender because it is unused to be relatively tasteless. Cuts from the front quarter of beef are preferred by master cooks because the heavy use and resulting connective tissues give it great taste.

We have a lot to learn.

Ryan Straw from Five Straw Farm sent the following note about cooking chicken and pork. **He brined the pork chops.**

FYI, brine solution is some combination of water, salt and sugar. Sometimes other flavors are added.

"I got a new cast-iron fry pan and have been experimenting with this lately. I made a wonderful chicken breast. A good exhaust fan is a bonus!

I pre heat the oven to 400 degrees. Heat the pan with peanut oil, extremely hot. Peanut oil has a high burn temp! Salt and pepper the chicken, like normal let it get to room temp or close before cooking. Sear each side for a minute or two. Should turn crispy golden brown, then transfer pan right to oven for about 10 minutes. Check temp with a thermometer until just shy of done. Take it out and let it rest 5 to 10 minutes and it will be done and wonderful!

I have done this with pork chops and they were excellent also. but did a brine as follows: Equal parts water and cider, (enough to cover the chops). 2:1 salt to sugar. I did

1 quart liquid = 1/2 C salt 1/4 C sugar. 1 cinnamon stick, 1 Apple mashed. Heat to dissolve. Cool with ice. Before placing chops in or you get sick! Brine while at work. Cook same as above! “

Many good cooks employ searing.

Everyone needs to use a thermometer, at least from time to time to keep in touch.

Spring Is Coming.

You cannot tell by the weather but the sun is hanging around a lot more.

We are less than a month from the equinox.

Little pigs are coming in late March. Earlier than in recent years.

Among other things that will allow us to start the fall hog harvest a few weeks earlier.

That will spread out the work load a little better at Quality Meats.

Remember to visit Sarah's Blog ([link below](#)) for information, recipes, past letters etc.

Best possible regards.

Tom

p.s. As always, email if you have questions.

p.p.s. Still time to order most things but do not put it off too long