

## THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS – 20 July 2006

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At dinner on Saturday night we were discussing the size of our pig, which is the sort of conversation you get when you invite farmers to your house. More specifically, we were pointing out that the table we were eating at was about the same size as the pig (though better designed for eating a meal on, not that I have ever tried eating a meal—or even a light snack—on Mickey Boy). This led to a discussion of the other useless animals at our farm: the ducks who eat dog food, the chickens who eat their own eggs, the donkeys who eat their barn (you might get the impression we are starving the animals). One of our hosts asked if we had any cows. He was not merely being polite. He grew up on a dairy farm and maintains his subscriptions to *Hoard's Dairyman* and *American Holstein*, a monthly publication featuring glossy pinups of doe-eyed lactating bovines. We responded, quite reasonably we thought, that we did not have any cows though we have considered getting one. The next morning, however, while chasing some of our chicks back into their pen (even at a young age our animals find ways to be annoying) I could not help noticing that we did in fact have cows. Four cows, to be precise (three Holsteins of undistinguished breeding and a Brown Swiss, to be even more precise). I discovered them hanging out placidly—as is a cow's wont—in the donkey barn (which, to their credit, they were not eating).

I know this sounds a bit like some sort of silly logical puzzle, like Car Talk gone agrarian. A vegetable farmer with donkeys, ducks, chickens and pigs but no cows has four cows in his barn. But I am not trying to stump you, and even if I were the answer is too easy. At least it is in this neighborhood. Strange cows in your donkey barn? Call DJ. Yes, he of the ducks.

Our animals have plenty of irritating habits. Even 14 and 15, who are in many ways excellent pigs. Though they have grown quickly, are enthusiastic turnip eaters and show real capacity for affection, they squeal horribly any time they think I might feed them—every time, in other words, that I walk anywhere near their end of the donkey barn. It is one of the most appallingly grating noises I know of. If alarm clocks sounded anything like 14 and 15 pleading for corn nobody would ever sleep through an alarm again (or own an alarm clock). But none of our animals run away. When they get out they just wander around the farm pecking on greens in the high tunnel or munching on a blueberry bush or tipping over the feed bins to help themselves. The donkeys have never gone further than the front lawn, even the one time they spent the night out, and the pigs and chickens often, after they have eaten whatever they should not have, go back to their pens—to eat things they should not.

DJ's animals, however, roam. Well, the ducks don't. They simply moved on. But DJ's other animals, the ones he has managed to hang onto for more than five minutes, all like to get around the neighborhood. Perhaps they are more sociable than our animals. Perhaps they are more curious. Perhaps DJ has lousy fences.

I do not mind too much when DJ's beagle comes by. She's usually on the trail of a rabbit and too busy to bother us. I felt sorry for DJ's boar, who came to visit Mickey Boy after all of DJ's other pigs died in a barn fire. But I would prefer not to have his cows over so often. Every year DJ raises a few heifers in his front field. And every year the heifers figure out how to get through the fence—given the nature of the fence it's hardly a taxing mental challenge, even for a cow—and wander. Sometimes they head out into our

## **This week's share: Eggplant, Garlic, Lettuce, Peppers, Hot pepper, Chippewa potatoes, Scallions, Squash, Basil**

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vegetable fields by DJ's house. Two years ago one heifer in particular developed a fondness for beans and Jacob and I had to chase her back into her pasture nearly every day. Mostly, though they go up the driveway to the road and turn south. One time they went the other way up Cooke Hollow and left large divots in Ann Connor's lawn. Ann had definite opinions about people who let their cows get out. She made DJ smooth out her lawn. Since then he seems to have made sure to get only southbound cows.

The cows don't just come to our house. They often stop at Mary Jane's on the way. Sometimes they drop in on the Pemricks too. And a few years ago three of them went all the way to Route 40. But they seem to have a strange attraction to our house. DJ took his four cows home Sunday afternoon. They were back six hours later. I suppose I should feel flattered. I don't. Cows are large, clumsy, stupid animals. They make bad guests, trampling the flowerbeds and knocking down fences.

What I want to know is at what point I am allowed either to keep DJ's cows or to eat them. I assume there's some locally accepted convention. Do they have to visit a certain number of times? Do they have to cause a certain amount of damage? Not that we really need any more irritating livestock. In principle I would be happy to let DJ keep them. Only, he's not very good at that. If they are going to hang out on our farm and cause destruction they might as well be ours. They would certainly fit in with the other animals on our farm.

Whatever the local rules on adverse possession of cows may be, I will take more drastic action if I ever catch them wrecking my crops. Fortunately so far they seem to happy to leave that task to the deer. And fortunately the deer choose to eat a relatively limited number of vegetables. Potatoes, for instance, are not on their list. And so here are some for you. They are new potatoes, which means we pulled them while the plants were still growing. Because they have not had a chance to cure they do not store well. If you are not going to eat them in the next day or two you should keep them in the refrigerator. But why wait? Especially when they taste so good sautéed with garlic.

As you can see, our squash patch has not suffered any deer damage either. If the squash plants keep producing like this we may have to force the deer to eat some of them. If it seems like too much squash in your bag you could give some to the deer yourself. Or you could grill them and eat them cold. I like grilled squash sandwiches with basil, onion and mozzarella. Or you could grate some and add it to pancake batter. Or you could sauté it with the eggplant, peppers, hot pepper garlic and scallions and eat it hot or add some vinegar and capers and eat the next day as a cold salad. Or you could practice juggling.

**Fruit share: Blueberries from Ken Denberg, natural Selection Farm, Cambridge, and red currants from The Alleged Farm.**