

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE FARMING : ADVENTURES IN CATTLE, VOL. 5

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in “Sustainable Farming : Adventures In Cattle” has been transposed directly from the website. That includes references to the PlayHaven Farm LLC and Green Building Project (PHF&GBP) website pages, external websites, links to documents, etc. Because of how quickly things change on the internet, there are NO links from this document.

MILD WINTER, THANKFULLY (JANUARY 2019)

The mild weather has left more grass green in the fields than expected, so the cattle did just fine between the alfalfa hay and foraging. The hubby opened the last area that had been “reserved” for winter forage just before the rain/snow started on Friday (2019Jan11). They are fine with ploughing through the snow to get to the grass, but we are also giving them an extra ration of alfalfa during this snow event.

As you may remember, we ended up with three (3) heifer calves in 2018. That meant no meat animals for the 2020 processing (unless I were to buy steers from someone else). I have been back and forth on how to proceed regarding the cattle. The problem is there is only one half-way resolution that I can think of where the hubby has time enough to devote to other things while we offer healthy beef options: someone wanting to do the day-to-day work with the cattle here on our land using our methods and equipment for a share in the profit. Otherwise, we either get out of cattle entirely or continue on the way we have been. I know I’ve said this before and gone so far as to advertise the cattle, but unless the profit-sharing or some other solution arrives before they are sold... I’m selling out. The Cowpooling steers are, of course, already sold via shares (and there are a few shares still available) so the 2019 processing will take place as planned. I’ll keep you posted.

FUTURE PLANS IF THE CATTLE LEAVE Part of making a decision regarding whether or not to continue with cattle has been what to do in the event they leave. I received a notice from the American Tree Farm System of an event in Columbia in March (you may recall that I am a REAL tree-hugger). When I researched it, I had one of those light-bulb moments because it lead me to the American Forest Foundation and their My Land Plan application (or “app” as you young whipper snappers say, LOL). For a change, other people have done the hard work and I don’t have to “re-invent the wheel” when it comes to figuring out how to best be a steward of our piece of the earth.

The land to the east of ours WAS in a conservation program and NOW has hundreds of cattle on it instead. SO, it only makes sense to me that if our land doesn’t have cattle on it, it should become a natural habitat oasis regardless of whether it earns any money for me as part of a conservation project. Of course, if I can come across grants, etc. to help it happen, that would be nice. SO, I am investigating what it takes to convert this for-profit (cough cough, excuse me, because profit is not a word I associate with a small farm) into a not-for-profit entity. I’m pretty sure that I would still be able to grow fruits and have an apiary to sell produce, honey products, and other non-food items as a revenue source in addition to donations etc.

THAT'S ALL, FOLKS! (MARCH 2019)

The cattle are doing just fine between the alfalfa hay/foraging and the few big round bales we were able to get in February. I had anticipated having to create hay “bunkers” for feeding the alfalfa but the cattle did not spoil any of it and were fine eating it off the ground/snow. The hubby did a fantastic job doling it out so that everyone got their share and even got into the habit of giving it to the cattle first to distract them before heading over to the two (2) big round bales to shift that hay as the bales became sculpted.

I told you I'd keep you posted and here it is: I'm selling out. Not only were we not able to find someone to work the herd for a share of the profits, we had a major life-style change the beginning of March. The details are not for public consumption and it is not necessarily a bad thing; it simply means there is no way we can continue having livestock on the farm.

The herd is for sale via this website and a few other cattle sale sites. **Update September 2019: the Cattle for Sale page has been archived in a PDF (Sustainable Farming : End Game - Cattle) if you are interested in that information.**

THE LAST VET VISIT AND HEIFERS AWAY (APRIL 2019)

The heifers were the first to sell. I discounted the price if they were purchased as a trio to be kept together at their new home. They were sold to a fellow in Oklahoma who was getting into cattle and would be part of his foundation herd.

The Oklahoma fellow was A-OK with taking delivery after the heifers were weaned and vetted.

The weaning occurred without any problems but then the Spring rains came with a GUSTO! We had planned to do the vet visit in the same general area in the West Pasture as in past years. However, when we attempted to enter the field with the portable corral, our vehicle got stuck at the gate and we had to abandon that plan and move the vet visit back a week.

The hubby set up the corral in the pasture to the south of the house since the gravel road to the house was not impacted by the heavy rains.

Luckily, we had several days without rain before the vet came out and he was able to get his rig in and out with only moderate rutting in the pasture.

This was the first vet visit that we saw problems of any kind with our animals.

- The heifers had contracted Bovine papillomavirus (BPV) which isn't a big problem unless you are showing your animals because they get warts from it which fall off after a few months and that may leave some scarring. I thought what I was seeing was ticks that had not fallen off yet (and even that would have been unusual because I'd never seen ticks on the cattle before). This virus is dealt with by a healthy immune system (no other treatment required) and once the cow has had it, it can't get it again and as long as the warts are gone, they are no longer carriers. Thankfully, the buyer was not concerned and it did not affect our agreement. It also was not a problem for transporting them across state lines. And yes, I did check with the vet on that in addition to researching it myself.

Additionally, we have no way of knowing how they contracted the virus. It is not considered an airborne virus. The only thing we can assume is that the cattle put into the field to the east of ours was a carrier and must have touched one of the heifers over or through the common fence line. But, that is simply a guess.

- The entire herd was infested with lice. Now, cattle lice is different from the lice we humans get and, no, they do not transfer to humans. The issue is that because they itch, the cattle were rubbing off their coats more than is normal to get the winter growth off. That makes the cattle look very patchy. The vet treated the heifers (and the hubby will deal with the rest of the herd).
- The condition of the herd generally was not as good as it has been in past years. But considering that they did not get the good, quality hay we usually get and had to make due with some old hay and the doled out alfalfa, they were at least equal to what the vet usually sees in cattle in the Spring... “sixes and sevens” (which I’m given to understand means a bit better than average condition).

The hubby had been concerned that Fernie had something going on with one of his hooves and wanted the vet to examine him. So, unusually, we herded him into the corral with the rest of the cattle for the vet visit. He was the first to head out toward the head gate but balked once he realized it and backed all the way into the corral again, blocking the alley to the “exit”.

Because of Fernie, it took MUCH longer than usual to maneuver the herd around him and get them into the chute to either be separated out to the other field or into the head gate. And, yes, he ended up being the last cow in the corral and refused to enter the chute so long as the only exit was through the head gate. Eventually, I made the executive decision that we would open the side panel and let him go to the field with the rest of herd without being examined by the vet.

As soon as we opened that side panel, Fernie walked calmly into the chute and to the the acceptable exit and stopped in such a way that the vet was able to examine (from a distance) his hooves. He stood there calmly for as long as the vet needed and when the vet was obviously done, Fernie calmly made his way to the other pasture with the rest of the herd. LOL, you just can’t make this stuff up!

Oh, the diagnosis about Fernie’s hooves was that they were overgrown (not having anything hard to wear them down) and the one the hubby was concerned about had a “sand crack” probably from being the favored leg when he put all his weight on less than all four (4). The vet recommended that the new owner be made aware and if they have the opportunity, to trim the hooves and treat the crack. No big deal.

This vet bill turned out to be more than double what I have come to expect and so I am very happy that it was the last one. I am also happy that I won’t have to use that vet again. It was a different person from the same office that I have used in the past and I’m not thrilled about him issuing treatment for things without getting my authorization first.

THE HEIFERS GO AWAY We decided to leave the corral where it was because of all the rain. I did arrange for a large load of gravel on the driveway into the West Pasture, but even with it, the pasture was too wet to get a truck and trailer in and out.

Once again, we had a few days without rain before the Oklahoma fellow arrived to load the heifers.

We once again herded the cattle into the corral (except Fernie)... but this time Brisket (the oldest of the steers) decided he was NOT going into that situation again and pushed his way through the electric wire (which was off because we were out there working the cattle) into the open pasture. Luckily, he wanted to be with Fernie, so the hubby opened the gate to the other pasture and Brisket made his way over there. The hubby put the wires back in place for the vet visit and we were able to separate the rest of the herd easily from the heifers, leaving them in the corral.

The Oklahoma fellow had a new trailer and had put a nice bedding of hay in the bottom for the long drive home. The heifers easily loaded into the trailer and their new life. I received an email from the Oklahoma fellow when they arrived home that all was well. Wasn’t that nice.

SOLD! (MAY 2019)

The breeding stock cattle are officially sold. They will be at the farm for a few more weeks until they are transported to their new home at Farrar Family Farm (<https://www.facebook.com/farrarfamilyfarmkc/>). I am SO happy that they are going to another sustainably operated farm not far from the Kansas City Metro. You and I can BOTH continue to get healthy food!

The steers go to be processed on June 21st and the breeding stock will be transported to their new home not long after.

NOTICE! There is SOME retail beef available from the 2018 processing still available! This is the same beef that took a 5th place in the American Royal Steak Competition! Whether you just want to buy some tasty, local, grass-fed AND finished beef or you want to see what it tastes like before you commit to a Cowpooling Share, I have cryo-vac sealed beef for sale!

I am accepting deposits for the 2019 Cowpool Shares UNTIL JUNE 14TH - two (2) steers are completely sold, but there are shares available in the remaining steer for 2019. Whatever is NOT sold via cowpool shares will be USDA inspected for Retail Sales.

Domino had her calf on Mother's Day - how fitting! It was a REALLY BIG SUPRISE because we were not expecting her to calf until June... which means that Fernie bred her the very first estrus cycle following the birth of Summer (her previous calf) on the Summer Solstice. It took a couple of days, but we have determined that her calf is a male. If things go the way they did last year, it looks like she may not only have a calf but be bred again as well. Luckily, that is OK with the new owners. Momma and baby are just fine and it is nice to have a calf running around again.

THE LAST PROCESSING (JUNE 2019)

I was really obsessing about getting the steers separated from the rest of the herd for processing this year. As you may recall, we have had issues with getting them into the portable corral and or trailer before. Then Brisket escaped during the attempt to corral them for the heifer transport. AND, to make matters worse, Brisket continues to disregard the electrified polywire (which is not always electrified these days for various reasons) to get to better grass than the rest of the herd. Unfortunately, the bull calf usually joins him (not having enough "grounding" to get a shock anyway).

Anyway, the hubby went to GREAT pains to create an escape-proof alley to the corral (5-wires on both sides, each side with a separate electric source so they could be live while we were moving the cattle). I asked for good energy from Facebook folks about moving the cattle without incident into the corral and then trailer for processing.

By June 21st, the West Pasture was usable again, so we set up the corral under the tree and arranged the chute so that the truck/trailer could be facing the gate to the road and placed on the gravel driveway. The hubby arranged with a friend/farmer to borrow his bigger trailer/rig and got everything in place the night before.

Then we herded the cattle into the alley and ... wouldn't you know it! ... Brisket AND the bull calf pushed through the electrified fence in different spots! Both of them got "bit" this time, but the bull calf pushed back through to be with Domino almost immediately. Brisket was in the big, open pasture and there was going to be one HECK of a time getting him where we could control him in any way. THEN A MIRACLE HAPPENED! Brisket followed the rest of the herd along the alley (on the wrong side) and at the last minute pushed BACK THROUGH the wires so that he walked INTO the corral with the rest of the herd!

We were flabbergasted! But not so much that we didn't close the gate behind them! As usual, Fernie was slowly making his way up the alley still, so instead of opening the corral, he was able to by-pass the corral and go directly into the pasture we set up for the cows to go into during the separation phase (directly next to the trailer).

Don't ever tell me that prayers and positive intentions don't work! It is the ONLY thing that can be credited in this situation.

We separated the cows (and bull calf) from the steers that evening, leaving the steers in the corral to load into the trailer the next morning. Thankfully, that bull calf having gotten a taste of the polywire kept him close to his Momma from then on!

It was easy in the morning to just open up the trailer and chute then hustle all three (3) into the trailer. Once they were inside the trailer, we shifted them into the front compartment and all was well. The only issue we had was the hubby missed a piece of wire that held the trailer to the corral panel chute and we ended up breaking a couple of welds on the gate panel (heavy sigh) before we realized it was still attached.

The forecast was for a major storm and we HIT that storm about halfway to Paradise Meats! Lightning, Thunder, Heavy Rain, Straight-Line Winds! Good thing the steers were in an enclosed trailer! All we could do was keep going. By the time we got to Paradise Meats it was barely sprinkling, the sun was shining and all was well. We were the first in line and the steers were HAPPY to get out of that trailer! SUCCESS! (And yes, as always, before we left, I blessed and thanked them; then I cried on the way home.)

SAYING GOODBYE ISN'T EASY (JUNE 2019)

The plan was for Gabe Farrar to follow us from Paradise Meats (he was also dropping off cattle for processing) back to the farm and transport the breeding stock to his farm the same day. That huge storm changed our best-laid plans.

We talked after he delivered his cattle and decided it would be smart for us to check the water situation in that West Pasture before he headed our way. Good thing, too. We had 1.75-inches of rain in about 30-minutes and the pasture was soggy! So we decided to put it off a week (and hope that the ground had time to dry out enough).

Once again I asked the Facebook folk to put good energy into moving the cattle into the corral (since they would be going back to the pasture with lots of grass and the pond), that the ground dried out enough to support the weight and traction of a truck and livestock trailer and that the transport to the new farm would be without incident.

My concern NOW was: would Fernie load onto a trailer? I'd been on the internet looking into how to get a 1500 lb bull onto a trailer. The advice I found was this: have treats and/or a cow in it first and don't have any time restriction... let the bull decide to go into the trailer. Gabe had the same ideas plus brought a couple of "paddles" they use to direct their cattle.

It was REALLY hot the following week and we decided to wait until Gabe arrived to herd the cattle up the alley and directly into the trailer so he could beat the heat as much as possible and get back to the farm early in the day.

If its not one thing its another! Gabe was late and we got a call telling us he was on his way but was driving a different rig. It turns out his usual truck started having problems 15-minutes from the farm and, luckily, someone was available to drive the other truck to his location where they switched it out. This is farm life, folks!

Between the hubby and Gabe, they got those cattle moving right along and into the trailer with minimal effort! (15 minutes, tops!) Such good cows! Fernie went right in with the girls. NO PROBLEM. Once they were all locked into the trailer, we were able to maneuver Domino and her calf into the back section and close the gate between so that Button, Nike and Fernie were in the front. Great for weight distribution and more safety for that calf.

Once again, I credit all the prayers and good intentions for the “assist” to the great work by the guys!

And, this probably won't surprise you: I cried as they drove away. Good-bye Fernie, Button, Nike, Domino and calf... we'll miss you.

Thankfully, Gabe sent us this picture of the herd unloading and heading to the shade where the rest of his herd was waiting to welcome them. What a great place to live!



p.s. On July 21st, I got a message from Gabe that Nike had her calf! Both healthy... a heifer calf with a full belt.

