

Thoughts from the Roost--#1 (2011)

About Prairie Bluff Farm

Prairie Bluff Farm is 60 acres of permanent pasture and remnant oak savanna with the farmstead settled roughly in the middle. The farm name comes from the small bluff outcrop on the south side of the farm and the remnant native prairie plants that propagate the shaded rough pasture behind it to the east. Someday, hopefully sooner rather than later, we'd like to reestablish an area of native prairie grasses and flowers around the bluff. We are adjacent to three landowners who have actively worked to restore native land features creating no shortage of good advice in the neighborhood.

Most of the 10+ small buildings and barn were hammered together in the early 1900's using a mixture of rough lumber, such as debarked tree limbs, and milled timber. In the heavy snows of December, 2009 the old 70 foot long machine shed collapsed. We did not hear its demise and fortunately no one was in it at the time. It was stunning to walk out to begin chores an hour before dawn, look to my left on route to the barn and realize something was missing. By the dim moonlight reflected off the snow, I could see trees and hillside that were previously blocked from view. The old shed looked like a victim of Paul Bunyan getting lost during the night and having a misstep.

The main farm house was constructed in 1903 and 1904. While doing some refurbishing in 2000, we found the inside face of the exterior walls to be covered in Norwegian newspapers of those years. There is a second building, built in 1914, near the main house that served as a summer kitchen and wood shop until we moved on to the farm in 1992. In that year, we began work to transform all 700 humble square feet of it into a home for Beth and I to live in. The main house was rented to supplement the income our milking herd of 20 Jersey's provided. After Beth's silhouette revealed a second child was on the way, we moved into the main house in 1996. The little house is often used by people who help on the farm.

The poultry buildings are the most recent addition to the farmstead. They are three hoop buildings, approximately 12' x 100' located in the middle of the front field to take advantage of the only reasonably level ground on the farm and the southern solar exposure needed in the winter months. The soil underneath the buildings was not disturbed during construction and can return to cultivation or pasture should the structures be removed someday. The buildings are designed to use natural ventilation for air exchange and sunlight for warmth and have thus far worked out well.

Another contemporary addition of human origin to the landscape are the pasture pens. They are 12' x 10' in dimension and we plan to have 25 to 30 of them meandering through the fields like a herd of turtles. You might think, "Why bother with those pens? My Aunt Mary just let her birds cluck around the yard?" I'll discuss how and why we manage the hens the way we do in the next edition.

Steve
Prairie Bluff Farm