

## Happy New Year 2013 to our Farm Friends!

We would like to thank all the families that supported our family farm this past year. We enjoyed meeting all our customers and giving tours of our farm to families and friends that are interested in discovering how their food is produced. Our Black Angus beef herd, the pastures, and the hay we feed them in winter continue to be Certified Organic through Pro-Cert. At the Canadian International Farm Show in Toronto we recently found out that only 1.6% of farms in Canada are organic. Here's a little run-down of events that happened on our farm in 2012:



### January 2012

In January we took a great leap forward and began a farm website! It took a few months to get up and running but it looks pretty good and contains a lot of information about our farm and its products. We have been happy with the comments received about the site. If you are interested in seeing it, please go to [www.sugarhillfarm.ca](http://www.sugarhillfarm.ca).

Over the past number of years we have been raising Aracauna chickens which lay green-shelled eggs. Over the fall months, I used to have two roosters and felt assured of success for spring chicks with having a back-up rooster. One day, I noticed that one was missing and a while later the second one died. So I was lucky to find a man who would part with a rooster so that I could have future flock reproduction in 2012.

### February 2012

With the unusually mild weather, the sap began to flow earlier than usual. I hung 4 sap buckets on a lovely warm day just to see if it was going to start. Within 24 hours the buckets were overflowing! Of course Mike was away, so we had to wait to get the other hundreds of buckets up a few days later when he returned. Lots of people visited our sugar shack. With such a great strong start to the season, it was disappointing to have it end so quickly with high temperatures. Mother Nature brought along too much heat too soon, and we ended up with only about one half of the amount of maple syrup being produced that a normal year produces. Our maple syrup sold out quickly. The warm weather was especially devastating for apple farmers. Many of their trees blossomed, which were subsequently frozen in the cold weather that followed. Very few apples were produced in our area, including our own trees in 2012.



### March 2012

Early in March our baby goats began to be born. We finished up cutting firewood for the season. One of the big jobs on a farm is keeping the trees back from the edge of the numerous hay fields. Over time, the trees encroach on the fields slowly making the fields smaller bit by bit over time.

## April 2012

With the days getting warmer, and the odd day with the night temperatures still below zero, the task of frost-seeding fields can be performed. With a special seed broadcaster mounted on the back of our ATV, Mike seeded many of our hayfields and pastures. The frost action works the seeds into the ground and helps rejuvenate pastures and hay fields.

Our Muscovy ducks began laying eggs and sitting on nests. This past year we allowed more ducks to sit on eggs than in past years as we wanted more ducklings to raise for meat by fall.



The peacocks and ring-neck pheasants also laid some eggs which we collected and put in our electric incubator to hatch. Eggs can also be put under ducks or broody chickens. After two batches of eggs going through the incubator, and nothing hatching, I figured perhaps it was the thermometer that was not working right. So when I replaced it with a brand-new one, we had lots of guineas and chicks hatch. But by then the peahens and pheasants had stopped laying anymore eggs. Sigh. Maybe better luck next year.



Monthly Limestone Beekeepers Guild bee meetings started up again, after a winter break. The club meets once a month, gives great advice, and sometimes have guest speakers.

Mike & Adam picked up the Red Tamworth piglets. Every year we have increased the numbers we raise. That first year we only had two piglets! Now just shy of 20. They spent most of their time here in a large outdoor area, sometimes breaking out and routing around and

being buddies with the horses in the next area!



Mike, Brian, Craig and a neighbour worked one whole weekend at building a page wire fence. Posts were augered into the ground using the Ford 6610 tractor, pickets pounded, braces built, and finally the fence stretched.



Good fences help to make good neighbours. Last year the littlest calves would continuously challenge the electric fence and go into our neighbour's beautiful vegetable garden, so that is why we went to all this work.

## May 2012

With all the flowers blooming, the bees got off to a great start for the season. One of the jobs is rotating bee boxes so that the bees fill up all of the spaces in the boxes. While rotating the bee boxes, Mike got stung seven times! The next day, I noticed the one hive was going to swarm as there was no more “bee space” or room left in the boxes. There was a dark mass of living, moving bees hanging on the vertical face of the box. Mike quickly put on third boxes to give them more room to spread before they flew away. Despite the promising start for the bees, it was a difficult bee year with extremely dry conditions throughout the summer and fewer than normal flowers.



In preparation for the Victoria Day weekend when we put our cattle on pasture, we walked the different rental pastures. The one pasture proved very worrisome this year. A mere nine days after the steers arrived there, they were breaking out. The herd continued to get out numerous times over the summer and were acting very spooked. As it turned out, there was an actual bear in the area, and seen IN the field where the cattle grazed! No wonder they wanted to leave. We ended up trailering the group back home earlier than planned. We did not want to lose an animal nor be chasing them all summer.

## June 2012



At our farm we continue to promote green energy. We installed our second MicroFit solar system which generates electricity and feeds it back into the grid. This one is a ground mount and it was installed by the edge of one of our hayfields.

Building repairs are constant around a farm. We hired a local carpenter to fix a hole in our barn roof and re-screw down the metal roof sheeting. The barn roof is very steep and high and this is not a job for the faint of heart!

We started cutting the hay in early June. At this early date, the hay is not tall but it is excellent quality and high in protein. The problem is that the daily temperature is not very hot and there is still significant moisture in the ground making it difficult to dry the hay. Therefore, we make haylage, which is high moisture hay wrapped in white plastic to exclude air and prevent the hay from heating up and rotting. Wrapped hay is the same principle as putting hay into silos. Haylage is great, high protein feed for the growing steers during the winter. With the help of our boys, Brian and Craig, we started the task. Good thing we did get the haying going early as the summer months ended up in a drought. In our area there is a shortage of hay



currently for many farmers.

## July 2012

Next came the square bales which were stacked in the haymow for the horses, followed by big round hay bales for the main cow herd. Luckily we now have a covered building for our hay. We were able to harvest enough hay to fill our coverall for the upcoming winter. Having hay under cover is a real saving, as leaving hay outside exposed to the elements wastes several inches on the outside of each bale. Studies have shown that this equates to every fifth bale being wasted.

In between cutting and baling hay we had our annual Pro-Cert organic inspection. An inspector comes to the farm and reviews all our processing records, followed by an extensive inspection of the farm, the animals, and our farm practices. We passed our annual inspection with flying colours. There was nothing noted to be changed from what we have been doing.

The meat chicks arrived. So cute, yellow and fluffy. We raised more than last year and by the time they were into customers' freezers, some customers were pleading for more.



We did quite a number of farm tours throughout the year. A biggie this year was for three daycares all at once that hired a school bus to make their way out to our farm altogether. It was on the hottest day of the summer, I'm sure. Another tour was for relatives who are dairy farmers in Arizona and were up to Canada for a visit.

After three years of building up our goat numbers, and having bought all the necessary equipment to milk the goats and store the goat milk, and calling the Ontario Dairy Goat Co-operative every month, we were finally told that the Co-op would not be giving contracts to start-up or small dairy goat operations. They would be giving more contracts to large goat herds to let them get larger. Without a contract we had no purchaser for the milk. We are not allowed to legally sell the goat milk ourselves. Now we had to take a hard look at Brian's Saanan goat herd. In the end, we decided we would have to sell them away. We have a few male kids still growing for people who want to buy them for goat meat this coming spring. The end of a young man's dream.

## August 2012

The dry weather took its toll on many farms. With almost no rain, pastures quickly ran out of grass and most farmers were feeding their winter hay stocks all summer. Luckily for our pastures, we practise intensive grazing with rapid rotations, and we do not overstock our fields. This allowed us to cruise through the summer without feeding any hay.

I was letting my Bronze tom turkey outdoors daily and back inside in the evenings. He did not return one night. Sigh. I now had female turkey hens



with no mate. I let the girls go back to the man I originally bought them from, as he had males but no females. Made sense to me. We will start over again in 2013.

We noticed that our bull had become lazy and did not keep up with the herd for some reason. After watching him for a week or so we realized that he was no longer doing his business with the cows. He was quickly replaced with a new, younger bull. It was time for new blood-lines.

## **September 2012**

We participated for the third year in a row in the third annual National Farmers Union (NFU) Open Farms Day. It was a sunny day that saw us hosting hundreds of visitors at our farm. We walked groups through the barn and showed the many types of animals, and how we make the maple syrup, and showed bee equipment, answered questions, and people bought barbecued hamburgers and beef sausages made from our own certified organic, totally grass-fed Black Angus beef. It was a very enjoyable day.

Towards the end of September, our Red Tamworth pigs headed out for the abattoir in Yarker. They looked good and ended up at a nice end weight.

## **October 2012**



Mike began the huge chore of manure spreading. The manure was pushed into large piles back in May in order to compost and dry over the summer. Spreading manure on our fields is an important element for maintaining fertility of our fields. Mike spread over 200 loads at approximately 2-3 loads an hour. Phew. He didn't want to be doing it in the cold of November/December.

We hired an excavator and a bulldozer to clear an overgrown-with-small-trees, abandoned hayfield and to also take out an old fence-row. It will give us about 3 acres of hay once replanted in the spring of 2013.

For the first time in three years, we were able to harvest some honey from our own bees. The first year the honeybees perished in the hard winter we had that particular year. The second year we had a bear attack the hives. We feel lucky to be able to get any honey. With this year's drought, the bee club took a poll and found that everyone got only about one half of the honey they usually do. I suppose it was a lack of flowers. We extracted about 7 frames worth. Not enough to sell but enough for the family for a year. Better luck next year hopefully.

## **November 2012**

After bring the herds home from pasture we had one elusive steer which we could not catch. We had to use a cow-catcher unit from the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association to catch the last steer that had gotten out from the pasture with the bear around. It worked like a charm. By this time of the year the grass was depleted, and throwing some good-looking hay into the

unit enticed the steer to come take a bite, the bars shut on its neck and then it could not back away. We put a livestock trailer up beside the steer, had ropes around its neck so it couldn't run away once the bars were opened up, and viola, it was returned home safely. End of problem and a lot of worrying.

## December 2012



My male ring-neck pheasant was dead one morning. I think he must have flew into a wall in the dark of night and broke his neck. I was able to track down a single male for sale that has now been introduced to my girls for hopefully babies this coming spring.

All through the year, Janet met with the beef customers. In the fall, the pork customers were added in.

We continued to board horses all year.

We bought a rear round bale hay bale spike for the 3-point hitch of our Ford 6610 tractor. Saves time and diesel as we can now move two round bales of hay out of the field at the same time. We should have gotten this piece of equipment years ago.

At Sugar Hill Farm we continually strive to raise great, wholesome food with our grass-fed Black Angus beef being our prime product. An interesting quote we recently came across stated, "Meat raised how it was meant to be raised so it tastes how it was meant to taste."

We would like to thank our supporters and those who recommended our products to others as we believe that recommendations from friends are the most powerful forms of advertisement.



Mike, Janet, Adam, Brian, Craig & Hilary