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***I want to see my business not just as a source of income, but as a way for me to express my love for life and for others.***

~Cecil O. Kemp Jr.

March 2009

Last season proved to be the most challenging year we've known. Our goal for having a licensed poultry processing facility fell through when the state informed us that the shed had to be serviced by a public well. The well that served our house was not sufficient in their eyes, which we believe is a non issue as long as the source of water is safe. Robert and I agreed from the beginning that in growing our farm business we would not incur debt. We would only increase at a rate that the farm itself could pay for. The processing shed alone consumed our cash on hand so the well would have to wait.

We work so hard! There are times during the summer months that we don't know if we can move another minute. Each requirement that the state passes on to us (meant for the big guy), is one more financial hurdle for our family that keeps us from seeing any monetary reward for all of the hours of hard work that have gone into building this business. It can be very discouraging.

We know that the food we produce is safe. Working under a license does not insure honesty, morality or food safety. We believe a close personal relationship and an open door policy, with no secrets, keeps us much more accountable to the people we serve. Having the state's stamp of approval makes it no more safe; it just burdens our endeavor! Believing our farm to be a community service and a ministry to God's creation, we will go ahead with the state requirement and drill a new well (making it the third on the farm) this spring so that we can deliver our poultry to farmers' market. This will eat up all of our profit for yet another year or two.

In the early summer our garden was hit with hailstorms on two consecutive weekends, the second being the worst. In my life, I have never seen hail like that! How those plants survived, I'll never know. From nearly leafless, the tomatoes still bore fruit!

Our first batch of broilers competed with cold, spring weather with heavy frosts, not advantageous to good health when being raised on pasture. Our loss from health related issues was tremendous and beyond our control.

We suffered much loss due to poultry deliveries that were delayed in the mail. Megan's ducklings were dead on arrival and our turkey poults traveled through the mail on some of the hottest days of summer- causing loss of a large percent of the poults throughout the brooder period.

We had to rebuild our pasture pens two times due to high winds that lifted the pens like kites, spiraling through the field and landing in shambles. We are thankful

they were not filled with broilers during these two wind storms.

As the season progressed, we watched our fall batch of broilers thrive, and breathed a sigh of relief. Uneventful can be SO good! Several days before we were to begin processing, the broiler pens were subject to an attack by a Cooper's hawk. Although he only killed one broiler to eat the loss we were yet to see was significant. We had to cull several due to mortal injuries and we stopped counting the number we had to cull during processing due to deep tissue and muscle bruises. We salvaged what we could by trimming wings, but most had to be composted. Our dogs ate well, some customers took chickens with no wings, some customers had fewer chickens than they ordered, and some customers had no chickens at all. In the end, we were devastated by feelings of helplessness and financial set back.

At the end of the season, we were all ready for a rest. It was tough! We will forever refer to that season as our character building year. In reflecting back, the Weebles come to my mind. Weebles wobble, but they don't fall down.....there were times we weren't sure we would bounce back up!

**What's new** Since November, we have had retail cuts available from our freezer. The beef, pork and chevon (goat) are processed at a USDA facility. If you would like to sample something before placing an order for larger quantities, if you are running low on last seasons order, or don't have a large freezer of your own- you can purchase cuts from ours. We have become fairly limited on beef, mostly ground left until June/July.

This year we will offer chicken feet and pet food. Chicken feet are a wonderful addition to your carcasses in making a deliciously nutritious broth rich in collagen. We will be saving our cull poultry and grinding the meat, along with necks, wing tips, backs and organ meats to freeze in cubes or patties for pet food. Please specify on the order form if you are interested in either of these.

We are offering three customer appreciation incentives this season. Please remember, we do no paid advertising to increase sales. We are dependent on our farm patrons to spread the word about us. Early orders are essential to a well laid out plan for the season. And finally, we are so appreciative to those families making a special effort to primarily feed their family on the meat our farm produces.

1) Refer a customer that places an order valuing at least \$100.00 by March 31<sup>st</sup> and *you* can choose from:

a. 1 broiler   b. 1 rabbit   c. 2# burger   d. 1# ground chevon   e. 1 bacon and egg

2) The first 25 orders received will be entered into a drawing for a cookbook of your choice:

a. Nourishing Traditions   b. From Asparagus to Zucchini   c. Local Flavors

3) If you place an estimated \$500.00 order by March 31st, your name will be entered into a drawing for your choice of:

a. A nitrate free smoked ham   b. fresh processed turkey

**Eggs** Eggs are available fresh at the farm or, for your convenience, can be found at: Mikado Market, Nedo's Farm Market, Mr. Ed's IGA or Freel's Market. There are two restaurants serving our eggs- Wiltse's Brew Pub and Family Restaurant and Reed's on the River. If you choose to dine there, please let them know how appreciative you are that they are buying local. We now have duck eggs! Gracie (our youngest) cares for the ducks and collects eggs in exchange for a monetary reward that she is using to

save for a pony. Duck eggs are good eating, but especially known for their baking quality and homemade noodles.

**Started Pullets** In January/February we will have 8-12 week old pullets for sale. If you have been considering starting a backyard flock of your own, now might be the perfect time. We will have a nice selection of hybrid and heritage breeds to choose from. Please let us know your interest.

**Stewing hens** Again this fall we will have a limited number of spent hens for the making of rich, golden broth, chicken and dumplings or soup. These generally go fast so speak up quickly.

**Broilers** We only order chicks to fill the orders we've received, so there is a fairly large lag time (at least 12 weeks) between your order and the finished product. Depending on demand, we will have several processing months to choose from. Please do not delay getting your orders in to us. We have a limit on the numbers we can raise for each rotation. The earlier you order for the dates you wish, the better the chances are that you will get what and for when you ordered; otherwise you might find yourself without chicken. We trust that you understand the situation and will order early! Please remember, the orders you place are for whole processed broilers. If you wish them cut up, we will gladly tutor you through a few or you can make arrangements at Klenow's Market in Tawas or Mr. Ed's IGA in Harrisville to have them cut up.

**Heritage Breed** Last season we raised some Delaware cockerels for a handful of customers desiring to try what chicken used to be like, before factory farming and grain finishing took over. These are single breasted birds that are long legged. They forage for a considerable amount of their diet, are very active and grow much slower. We are willing to raise them again this year, based on demand.

**Turkeys** These are broad breasted commercial white turkeys. They grow fast and clean up well for processing, not leaving dark feathers or ink spots on the skin. We will be raising two rotations, one ready prior to Labor Day Weekend and one ready the week of Thanksgiving. The Labor Day Weekend turkeys will be all hens, perfect size for the deep fryer or smaller gatherings. The Thanksgiving turkeys will be hen and tom for a greater variety of finished weights. Please specify on the order form if you have a size preference and we will try our best to accommodate this, but you should be ready to accept a bird within a couple pounds of your desired weight.

**Duck** Megan loved raising the ducks last year! They are fantastic entertainment and delicious eating. We had never eaten duck before. She learned much and will be raising them again this year. She will raise them up a couple weeks longer for a better yielding carcass and hopefully a cleaner pick. They are difficult to process and we thank you for your patience.

**Geese** We have heard from a few requesting a traditional Christmas goose. Gracie (our youngest farmer) is willing and able to take on this project if there is a great enough

demand, with the guidance of her older sister, Megan. Geese eat tremendous amounts of vegetation, no bugs, no meat. Understanding their nature, we are going to try to rear them in the corn, potato and strawberry gardens to eat the weeds and grasses as they grow up. Wish us luck!

**Game birds** For all those that like it a little on the wild side, Ryan will be raising Ringneck pheasant. In the past, he has raised quail and partridge. Pheasant have required more space than we had access to, so he is really excited to finally be able to raise these. He will use the same pasture pens he used last year to raise the partridge. If you would like them live for release, please specify this on your order form.

**Rabbit** We spent many hours catching rabbits that had escaped from their pasture pens last year. Until we design a pasture pen that the rabbits cannot escape; we will finish them on pellets and free choice hay or cut and carry forage, depending on the season. We hope to have tunnel proof pasture pens constructed this spring.

**Pork** Our freezer is stocked with retail pork cuts for those that don't have a freezer themselves. If you don't own a large freezer, it is one of the best investments you can make for your family. A family of two can easily utilize the meat from a 1/2 hog- only yielding about 70 pounds for your freezer. It is the most economical choice: it keeps good, quality food choices at your fingertips and saves as much time as money by limiting trips made to the grocer or our farm.

**Beef** Most spoke for their freezer beef last fall. If you haven't, please do so quickly, because the beef is first come, first served. Our beef is grassfed and finished. Unlike grain fed steers, the fat in a grassfed animal is vital to our good health. Dr. Tilak Dhiman of Utah State University has found grassfed beef to be:

- 1) anti-carcinogenic
- 2) helps prevent obesity
- 3) anti-diabetic
- 4) anti- antherosclerosis (heart disease)

Some of grassfed's benefits in comparison with grain fed products are:

- 500% more CLA
- 400% more Vitamin A
- 300% more Vitamin E
- 75% more Omega-3
- 78% more Beta-Carotene

Based on these results, a steak from a cow grassfed and finished is even healthier than chicken breast- the white meat most recommended by health professionals. Go grassfed beef!

**Lamb** Megan and Ryan are teaming up to raise lamb. Like our beef, they will be grassfed and finished. We believe they will be a perfect compliment to our farm because, in general, they do not compete for the same forages as cows and they do not share or host the same parasites, making the cycle a dead end. They have chosen the Tunis; a medium-framed, mild flavored, aggressive forager that finishes well on

good pasture without grain input. They are thrilled and a little nervous by the challenge they face in learning something new.

**In the Garden** Fresh, in season, produce will be available at the farm on Fridays from 3:00 - 7:00 p.m., on poultry processing days, and at Alcona Farmers Market on Saturdays (June-October) from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Megan and Ryan's strawberries will be ready for harvest this summer. Let us know if you have an interest in these, otherwise they will be available at the farmers market.

We are mailing this newsletter to many new, prospective customers who have not placed an order with us before. I thought it worthwhile to repeat some issues related to customer responsibility that most of you already know, so bear with me.

When ordering poultry, duck, goose or game birds, please specify on the order form the number you want on your preferred processing days. I will call to firm up an exact date as soon as I can schedule that particular rotation out (usually two weeks prior to your date). Any poultry custom raised by us must be picked up from the farm on your specified day and time. If you cannot, please send someone in your place. We do not have the capabilities to hold orders over beyond the processing day.

We will have bags available to purchase and a table for you to use if you wish to bag them here. Many choose to bring clean coolers and take their birds home to cut up and/or bag there. If it is hot, please bring ice with you.

All custom orders for half or whole hog, beef or lamb must be picked up from the processor in a timely manner. If you are ordering a whole of any animal, you can choose a custom processor, within reason- otherwise animals sold will be taken to the USDA facility in Falmouth.

In closing, we would like to sincerely thank you for your patronage and loyalty. We are honored to be chosen to serve your family, especially in these tough economic times. We truly believe that it becomes that much more important to think through *where* we spend each dollar and *what* each purchase supports. We look forward to seeing you all again this season and hope that if you have any concerns or criticisms you will be sure to pass them on to us, so that we can continue to improve upon ourselves and the animals we raise. If you have any questions, we are only a phone call away and please remember that our year runs much smoother when we have prompt responses to our newsletter. Do not delay, fill out the order form and pop it in the mail. We'll see you soon.