



Trumpeter Swan Farm

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Chicks In The Mail

We will be getting baby chicks in the mail this week. That's right – in the mail. The post office will still pick up and deliver live chicks, just as it did 100 years ago.

When chicks hatch, they still have some yolk left inside them that they continue to draw on for sustenance while they adapt to finding food and water. So they can go for 3 days without food or water after hatching, if needed. If packed carefully, they can keep each other warm as well. We get chicks from Hoover Hatchery in Iowa, so they actually come next day, healthy and happy. The post office calls us when they arrive in the morning, and we drive into town to pick them up right away.



A few years back, we had to order from another supplier and the chicks actually came from El Paso, Texas. So they rode a truck to Dallas, then American Airlines to Minneapolis, and then truck to Buffalo. It took three days to get here – they were fine – but that's a little too far for our comfort.

We have an insulated room in our barn that is our brooding area. We use heat lamps to keep the chicks warm. In nature, the mother hen provides that extra warmth for a couple of months. We have to watch them carefully to make sure that they are not too cold or too hot – but “just right”. They are too cold if they are all huddled under the lights and not very active. And the heat lamps are too hot, if they avoid sitting right under the lights – that lets us know we need to raise the lamps higher to reduce the concentrated heat.

Finally, when they are big enough, with lots of feathers, they can be on their own. We like to call them “tweens” – between a chick and a hen. At that point, we move them to an area next to the grown up hens. Its helps them get acquainted with the flock and the rhythms of the barnyard.

Coming Events

Open House – Saturday, Feb 7, 2pm-5pm

Baby Chicks Arrive. An opportunity to come see our chicks when they are just a few days old. Kids always get a kick out of the little puff balls!

Other activities include the Buffalo Farmers Market (10am-1pm) and a visit to the Trumpeter Swan viewing area along the Mississippi River in Monticello. See links on our web site under the Community tab.

What's Growing

Ash has set up our hydroponic system in the lower level of the Process Building. We continue to gain experience at growing things while using the heat that the lights give off to heat the building during the winter.

The lettuce is looking good, and we've planted some other crops like bok choi to see how they do. Our goal is to have it running smoothly when the Spring CSA season starts in April so we can get a jump on fresh produce right away.

In The Field

We planted cover crops of Oats and Winter Rye last fall. Winter Rye, being very hardy, is still green. It will survive and start growing right away in the spring. We planted it in low areas with the idea that it would soak up excess moisture and help dry the soil out faster.

Oats will “winter kill”, so they are ready to disk up right away to make way for spring plantings. They were planted in the higher areas that dry out first, and thus will be planted first.

Equipment Corner

Hydroponic System

Water, with nutrients, constantly bathes the plant roots. A bubbler keeps the water oxygenated for healthy roots. And fluorescent lights provide lots of light for the plants. It's impressive how many lights you need to duplicate basic sunlight. The heat from the lights helps heat the building during winter.



Mature lettuce, new bok choy



Bare roots in water



Water tank with pump and bubbler

Farm Personalities

Stripe and Smoke – Farm Cats

Which one is Stripe? Which one is Smoke? Growing up as sister and brother, they like to hang out together. But also they like to sneak up on each other and “attack”. And, of course, they get on each other's nerves sometimes, and then they hiss and howl. In the winter, they like to sleep on the boot bench in the garage where we keep various footwear. A small heater inside dries out the boots and keeps them warm. They can feel the warmth lying on the wood top and find that it's a cozy spot to relax on cold days. They are good at catching mice in the barn, but draw the line at rats.



In The Coop

Chickens need extra calcium for making egg shells. Their feed contains 4% calcium. We also supply extra calcium should they want more. It's ground oyster shells. In winter it's more important since another source of calcium, insects and grass, is not available.

Chickens, like all birds, also require pebbles to grind their food. The gizzard, which precedes the stomach, holds those rocks and its strong muscles grind up the food into a fine slurry. The rocks wear down and need replacing. So they “eat” rocks. In the winter, when the ground is frozen, we provide crushed granite pebbles