



## Trumpeter Swan Farm

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# Newsletter May 2015

## Eggs, Bird Flu and Compost

How long can I keep eggs? It's a common question. The answer is 1-2 months. An egg is actually a single cell organism that is sterile inside its membrane. In older days, eggs were valued as they did not need refrigeration and kept for a month or two. Eggs spoil when they finally dry out enough so that bacteria can enter the membrane. To reduce the possibility of spoiled eggs we now refrigerate eggs.

Will we be affected by bird flu? Our chickens go outside and mix with wild birds. So our hens are exposed to common bird influenza and colds and other diseases. So they have had some illnesses over the years, just like we do. Hopefully, that

helps them develop a robust immune system, so that if they are exposed to the latest bird flu, they will not be so dramatically affected as those poor turkeys and chickens in the large isolated barns.



How do we make our compost? Chicken manure is high in nitrogen. So we add wood chips to provide a source of carbon. Carbon, plus nitrogen, plus some water is what allows bacteria and mold to make protein and grow their bodies. The undigested fiber and wood cellulose provide a source of energy for those bacteria and molds. The rapid growth creates heat. The first cycle of the compost pile will heat to 160 degrees inside. After a few weeks, the growth slows and the temperature declines. Then we move the pile to our compost bunkers, and in the act of mixing it, starts a second compost cycle of heating that finishes the compost. After 6-9 months, the compost is ready to spread on the field.

## Coming Events

### **Open House – Saturday, May 30, 1pm-4pm**

Peas are climbing on their trellis. Greens are growing up on Hilltop. Seeds are emerging. Asparagus is everywhere.

Kids can plant onion sets, plus take some home to plant outside somewhere. We have seed potatoes and strawberries you might want to take home and plant in a small spot.

The Buffalo Farmers Market is in the morning, on Saturday, in downtown Buffalo, from 8am-noon. Coffee, doughnuts and muffins, homemade pretzels and toffee. Check [www.buffalofarmersmarket.com](http://www.buffalofarmersmarket.com) for more info

## What's Growing

Sugar Snap Peas are climbing their trellis. Spinach and lettuce are coming along. After the rain, the asparagus is growing quickly. Rhubarb made its appearance in mid-May. Flower buds are forming on the raspberries.

We had two nights in mid-May where frost came close, but we escaped both times. We should now be free to plant our summer seeds like beans and summer squash, plus transplant out tomatoes and peppers. Big rains like the one we got May 17 (2.5 inches) always make us nervous, harking back to previous years where it gets too wet. But a nice drying week followed, and 5 days later, we resumed planting, so all is well.

## In The Field

Staggered planting is important so everything does not mature at once. Plus it helps provide new plants when older ones start to fade.

We try to plant green and yellow beans each week if weather allows. Going thru end of July, we typically have about 10 plantings.

Broccoli and cabbage can be planted all summer, usually every 2 weeks. And summer squash and cukes are on a 4 week schedule, so we get about four plantings in a season.

## Equipment Corner – Mulch Layer



We bought a mulch layer last fall. Traditionally, a mulch layer will lay plastic mulch about 3 feet wide to suppress weeds. Transplants are placed in holes in the plastic. Since water can't penetrate the plastic, one also lays drip tape underneath to supply water. We've always hesitated to do plastic mulch since it results in a lot of work to gather up the mulch in the fall, and results in a lot of plastic mulch and drip tape to dispose of in the landfill.



However, we had an idea to use compostable plastic (made of corn starch), and lay it in narrow 12" widths so we would not have to use drip tape, allowing water to seep in from the sides and the punch holes. Last summer we hand laid some plastic to try out idea, and it worked very well, with the old plastic decomposing in about a year. So we bought the mulch layer and figured out how to modify it some to lay 2 rows of narrow plastic. So far, it looks like it will do just what we want.



## Farm Personalities – the Erickson Triplets

Well, maybe they are not triplets. But, they are brothers and sister. Stephanie Erickson (center) started working at our farm in 2013, then Jordan (left), and finally Mike (right).

Jordan is our youngest employee, he is 13. While most jobs have a minimum age requirement of 14, farm jobs are an exception – kids can start at 12 years old with parent permission. Mike is the oldest, working on our computer system generating labels and lists when not needed outside. And Stephanie, in the middle, processed eggs and did deliveries all winter.



## In The Coop

Our February chicks are now big enough to mix in with the rest of the chickens. After a few days, they all get used to each other and find their own places to hang out.

Our spring cleaning is finally done in the barn. The compost pile in the barn is moved to the outside bunker for a second compost cycle. And all the manure from the last few months is now mixed with wood chips and out in the barnyard pile for its first cycle.