



Link'd Hearts Ranch

What a difference a year makes! This time last year our family was certain of very little as we launched the addition of pastured poultry to our farm's offerings. A year later, we have learned quite a lot more than we could have imagined, and are grateful for the journey of 2014. Thank you for being a part of an exciting year.

Lessons Learned

There were so many lessons we learned last year and I want to share with you a few.

Broilers

When you raise chickens for your personal freezer, and you don't think they are quite as big as you like, you wait another week, no big deal. When you have 50 people waiting for pick up that evening, it is quite another matter. Since we always strive to do better than before, we adjusted the 2015 schedule to allow extra time for the birds to gain weight. We have found that the extra time results in a meatier bird, however it means for this year there will be five batches of chickens raised and not six. The price for chicken remains the same as last year. **2015 orders are now being accepted, and for your convenience, an order form is attached in pdf format. Feel free to share with anyone that is interested.**

Pick up days

A few customers were confused about our pick up schedule. So let me explain a little about why we operate the way we do and offer a helpful tip. We are a family operated farm which means all of the processing of chickens is done by our family, not hired employees. Given that Richard works a full time job, we must balance his work schedule with processing days. The best compromise at this time is to limit our processing to Fridays and Saturdays. We suggest that if these days do not work for your schedule, that you might find a "pick up day buddy" when placing your order this spring. This could be a family member, friend or neighbor that could pick up your chicken for you. When you find your pick up buddy early in the season, it allows you both to order chicken and coordinate your schedules around vacations and work. We are always happy to give reminder calls directly to your pick up buddy. Given the busy pace of summer on the farm, we hope this will eliminate most last minute cancelations.

Turkeys

Oh wow, what an experience! Last year we had loads of customers ask us about turkeys. We raised several turkeys for our family. Joey, our oldest son, even helped us run a survey of customers asking about customer preferences on turkeys. And while we knew all summer long raising turkeys, that they were indeed far different than raising chicken; processing day confirmed, turkeys are just a huge leap. We discussed this as a family all through fall and the Thanksgiving holiday. We had indeed raised some mighty tasty pastured turkey! But our conclusion, was that our main focus is pastured chicken. We want to focus on quality production of everything we do, not quantity. We would rather move at a slower pace and master what we know, than stumble by adding too much, too fast and sacrificing along the way. We hope our customers will understand this is ultimately in your best interest as well as ours. So for 2015, we will be raising another small personal batch of turkeys with only a handful that will be for sale. These turkeys will be offered only to those receiving this newsletter, and will require a \$30 non-refundable deposit. I know there will be a lot of competition for these few turkeys, so it will be first come first served on the hold deposits. After that we will keep a waiting list. Given the interest expressed last summer, I would not be surprised if deposits were collected and at "waiting list only" in a matter of days. Turkeys will be \$3.97 per pound and processed in early to mid October. We will be raising Broad Breasted Bronze turkeys with a weight range of approximately 18-25 pounds. The \$30 deposit will be subtracted from the final price. We hope that as our farm business grows and we feel comfortable, to add additional turkeys in coming years so that more families can celebrate their Thanksgiving with a locally raised, pastured turkey on their table. For a few lucky families however, we are happy to share our extra turkeys with you this year. Deposits will be accepted immediately.

OTHER NEWS

Lambs

We were so pleased to have sold out on lamb last summer. As I write this newsletter, our ewes are getting bigger with this year's lambs. At the request of our butcher, we are moving away from the sales of half lambs, and encouraging the purchase of whole lambs to each customer. This does not prohibit you from sharing the cost of a whole lamb with a friend. While the price of hay continues to rise, we have decided to hold our prices steady for one more year and reevaluate next year. For 2015, our whole lamb prices will remain the same as last year, \$200, butcher fee is not included. \$50 non refundable deposits will be accepted after April 1st. Final payments will be due October 1st and lambs will be processed towards the end of October or early November with butcher fees paid to the butcher when you pick up your packaged meat.

Pastured Eggs

Last August we expanded our flock size to accommodate our growing demand for eggs. We are in the process of upgrading our licensing so that we will be able to sell our eggs at farmers markets and even offer delivery. The increased costs associated with meeting this new license, coupled with the rise in the price of feed has necessitated that the price for eggs now be \$4 per dozen.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I am incredibly thankful and humbled by the enthusiasm our customers have shown for our farm and products. Bringing you healthy, wholesome, quality food to nourish

everyone at your table, gives me a huge smile and delights my heart. I feel I have found my life's calling in pasture based farming and it excites me everyday. Thank you for allowing me to do what I love, because without you, this would not be possible. As we begin 2015, I am filled with hope for a season even better than last. While news of Avian Flu in our state does cause us to take note and be ever vigilant in monitoring our flock, I refuse to panic or worry about that which I cannot change. The state and industry advised procedure is to keep all chickens indoors all the time so they have no contact with the outside. The bottom line is our farm will not compromise our values and ideals. We believe that chickens should be raised outside with fresh air, green grass and sunshine. Healthy, happy chickens make for a healthier food on our table. We hope that you will journey with us again in 2015! Pastured poultry orders are now being accepted. We can't wait to see you again for our first pick up day at the end of May! Hopefully by then we will have blue skies, the warmth of the sun, green fields with happy animals and veggies springing up in the garden! Welcome to a new farming season with Link'd Hearts Ranch!

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