

Hello and Happy 2016!

As I sit down to write this letter, the snow blankets the ground in white. Oh how grateful I am to see the water returning to our parched fields. Last year will certainly be remembered as the year of heat and smoke! Frankly, 2015 was a difficult year here on the farm. It seemed like every time I turned around something else was going wrong. Some of the pain was financial, as slowed growth rates and lack of grass meant mounting feed costs. Other pain was gut-wrenching and heart breaking as lives slipped away too soon. Life and death are absolute facts in farming, but sometimes a good cry can soothe a farmer's soul. By the time the season ended our entire family was weary and tired, I was amazed we had seen it to the finish.

Farmers, though, must be eternal optimists, and before New Year's came, I was again filled with renewed energy and excitement. When I think about 2016, the word that comes to mind, is HOPE. I am just itching to see the explosion of newborns that will soon be on their way. Goat kids are due first, in mid-February, quickly followed by lambs in March. If you have never experienced the smile and laughter that comes with watching newborn goats and lambs play, I welcome you to come out and see the frenzy of energy. In mid-March the poultry parade will begin when the first peeping box of yellow fluff arrives. That is when the marathon of farm work hits its stride, and doesn't seem to stop until fall. The number of turkeys offered this year has expanded over last year, so watch as a new mobile turkey roost is constructed this spring. Seeds are soon to be ordered and nurtured to life in a few short weeks. The garden will be filling in by the first poultry pick up. After a trial by fire, last year, I spent countless hours this winter revamping our self-serve CSA garden membership with the hopes of making it function better for customer and farmer alike. New ideas always take time to work themselves out, and I appreciate our 2015 members for sticking with me through the double whammy of incredible heat coupled with working out the first year kinks. Across the farm, all of our hard lessons from last year have turned back into enthusiasm, becoming fuel to drive us to do better than before.

The next word that comes to mind is HEALTH. My idea of health manifests itself in multiple directions this year- Financial, Sustainable and Physical.

Financial health for our farm is a focus this year. In 2015, Richard and I completed a Farm Financials class and I am pleased to say, passed with an A grade. We learned not only about record keeping but also about how to assess the financial health of our farm. Most people shy away from talking about this topic, but I feel it is important to be open about such matters. With this new education under our belts, we have decided to take a strategic approach to our improvements. Delaying some, but focusing on the critical ones now, so that we can provide the best products, and maintain the financial health of the farm. In a positive financial report, in 2016, we will pay the final installment of our poultry capital startup loan. This achievement isn't possible without support from customers like you, and we look forward to sharing the payoff celebration with you. Financially viable farms can weather storms, build for the future and are better able to supply their communities with needed wholesome local food. We want you to know that you can depend on us to be here for years to come.

The heat of 2015 has also led to the focus on the sustainable health of our land and animals. 2016 will be our first in a multiple year project to improve the health of our pastures, soils, and mitigating temperature and wind extremes. We have come a long way from where we started when we purchased the property in 2008, but last summer showed there still is a lot of work ahead. We believe strongly that our animals are a critical part of healing the land. When animals live as they are intended, outdoors, eating grass, they are happier and healthier. Our goal is to continually improve the quality of the land we steward, and thereby the animals we raise, and in turn create a meal for us that nourishes both body and spirit. Later this summer we plan to host our first ever Customer Tour Event here on the farm – part: customer appreciation, fun, sharing how our farm operates, and sharing our vision for future sustainability. We hope you will consider coming out and spending time with us for this special day.

Personal physical health and wellbeing is my largest focus for this year. Ann Wigmore said it best – “The food you eat can either be the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison.” Every day I confront the realities of this quote: from the frustration of dealing with doctors searching for answers to my own medical dilemmas this past year, to hearing the heart breaking news that someone else I know lost their life to cancer. I know many of our customers purchase from us because of their own personal food and health journey. High quality, wholesome, nourishing food may not be the complete answer to all ailments, but I believe, with everything that I am, that what is on the end of our fork is a large part of the answer. For these reasons, our family is redoubling our focus on healthy eating: eliminating processed foods, reducing refined sugar, and eating in season what we grow ourselves or what is grown by our local community. Our family is so blessed to have a bounty of healing nourishment just outside our door and I am grateful for the opportunity to share it with all of you. Thank you to each of you for helping us live out our dream and build this farm with each passing year. I have tremendous hope for a healthy 2016!

The 2016 order form is attached to this newsletter as well as on the farm website. You can also find us with paper order forms at the Pullman Winter Pop-Up Markets, and starting in May, at the Pullman Farmers Market. Check our farm Facebook page for up to date details on those events. If you need additional details about the ordering process or farm products, we have put new flyers on the website.

We are now accepting orders for 2016. Last year we sold out earlier than anticipated and did not even have one booth at the Farmers Market. This year we expect to sell out even faster being at the Markets early in the season. So please do not delay in turning in your order form. Please feel free to share this information with your friends and neighbors; after all it never hurts to have more than one “Poultry Pick Up Buddy” and the biggest compliment you can give us is a referral!

Thank you again for supporting Link’d Hearts Ranch! See you very soon!

AlyssaMarie Link