

**Subject:** Fwd: Link'd Hearts Ranch 2017 Newsletter

**Date:** Tuesday, January 31, 2017 at 10:46:31 PM Pacific Standard Time

**From:** Link'd Hearts Ranch

**To:** sales@linkdheartsranch.com

Hello Farm Supporters, Customers and Friends,

I can hardly believe a new season is upon us already! Our 2016 season, all-in-all was a great year. We had a few bumps along the road but most of those in the end made us better farmers, and better people.

Our 2016 spring was wet and for all the delays it caused for working in the garden, we made up for in abundant spring grass for the chickens. Never before have we had to mow in front of chicken pens because the grass was too tall, but we had to mow at least 3 times! Our broiler chickens over the season averaged more than half a pound larger than the previous drought stricken year. I think everyone enjoyed the meatier chickens and we hope to keep nice looking broilers headed to your plate this season too. The turkeys were their own little saga when we lost 75% of our flock in a single night to some rather brazen coyotes! Fortunately, the encouragement and wisdom of our neighbor farmers strengthened us, and we tried again, but with improved housing and perimeter security. When the turkeys were finally done the week of Thanksgiving, they were hefty and tasty centerpieces for the holiday. The demand for turkeys was so high that we have increased our order for this season. I know its hard to think about Thanksgiving 2017 already, but placing your reservation and deposit early in the year, really does help us to raise out those turkeys and is one less thing for you to worry about come the holiday season.

As spring turned into summer, the rush of kidding and lambing was done, and the garden began to take off. The months and months of work nurturing small transplants began to pay off as plants filled in and began to bloom. Our Self-Serve CSA program has been a personal joy. If the yummy veggies weren't reason enough to love the CSA, our amazing members would be the reason. I love getting to know our members, their stories, hearing about their culinary adventures with our food, and working beside people who care about our garden and farm like I do. We tend to get a lot of questions about the garden on chicken pick up day, so if you have ever wondered, here is the scoop. Our Self-Serve CSA program began a few years ago, and is an opportunity for customers to purchase a pass to the garden for an entire season. CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. The fee is paid up front to cover the costs of seeds and supplies. Effectively, our program is like having your own garden, but without the worry of planting, watering or finding a garden sitter when you leave for vacation. Members are allowed to come out as often as they want during the growing months and pick whatever vegetables, fruits, and herbs they need for their family. Some members earn a discount by volunteering time to weed during the season. The 2016 season really amazed me with the bounty of produce that could be grown. I am excited this year to be expanding the footprint of the garden once again to make room for a new berry patch that will be planted over the next couple years. This year we have ordered in the first wave which will be thornless blackberries. If you are interested in joining our Self-Serve CSA, now is the time! We are looking to add some additional members for 2017. We will also be working towards season extension with a variety of row covers as needed, as well as organic bug protection. Our pumpkin patch grew over a ton of pumpkins and winter squash in 2016, so much that our CSA members couldn't (or wouldn't) take any more! This year our plan is to grow about 10 varieties of different pumpkins in various sizes, shapes and colors. Which in addition to providing all the pumpkin needs for our CSA, will allow us to have a U-pick pumpkin patch in the fall for customers wanting to purchase pumpkins. We plan to advertise at the farmers market, on chicken pick up days and on Facebook, so be sure to watch for details as those pumpkins get closer to harvest. We hope to make this a fun fall event.

The fall of 2016 seemed it would never end. While the coyotes were responsible for the turkeys being 6 weeks behind schedule, the butcher losing his assistant the same week as the local county fair, had our pork and lamb staying on the farm much longer than anticipated. Our butcher apologized to us all and has promised he won't let us ever wait that long again. His wonderful wife, even made sure to note on their Christmas card that they had finally found and hired the right person to take on the second butcher position.

Joey will be raising pigs again this year. He is very passionate about providing for them. Rotating them onto fresh areas for them to forage, and be the best pigs they can be. If you are interested in pastured pork please feel free talk to Joey, as we are encouraging him (teenagers need encouragement) to be more customer oriented in regards to his pigs. We also purchased a new Rambouillet ram lamb this fall to breed our Romney ewes. We are hoping this new ram will give our lambs some hybrid vigor to make for larger and faster growing lambs this spring. It was after careful consideration and disappointing hanging weights on our 2016 lambs that we have made the decision to put lamb sales on sabbatical for 2017. We do not want to compromise on our belief that lambs should be pasture raised and grass fed, but we also believe our customers should receive this quality product at a reasonable price. We are hoping this years management adjustments will have the desired results, but until we know for sure, we won't be taking deposits. We are always happy to accept names for a waiting list when and if we resume lamb sales, but we will not guarantee any sales until we are happy with our program.

The frustrations of late fall on the farm were matched equally on the home front too. The week after Thanksgiving, I (Alyssa) received a phone call from my family doctor. My recent physical and lab tests had turned up some concerning results. Two days later, I was having liver biopsies. I did not rebound as quick as the doctors had expected and took weeks to recover. By mid December I had more lab tests done and finally found myself expedited to see a specialist. The auto-immune health issues I have had since childhood, have expanded into the most serious manifestation to date. We are incredibly thankful to report that at the end of January, a follow up series of tests confirmed that the current course of treatment has been successful in shifting my body back into health. The doctor has given me the green light to move forward with my farming year in good health. If we failed to return a phone call or email during the last couple months, I hope you can forgive us. We didn't fall of the earth, but were busy trying to hold everything together as we felt so much of our lives would have been changed if the results had been different. We are very blessed to be supported by close family and friends. In the end, the issues with my health proved to be a reminder of what is truly important. We did have our 2017 chicken schedule ironed out in October, but we are grateful to have taken a few months to quietly reflect before jumping into this new year and taking orders. There are few things in this life that I hold more dear to me than this farm. It is my passion and my life's work. It is a dream that is still unfolding and I am committed to this farm for as long as I have breath, even if adjustments must be made to keep me strong and successful.

Our goals for the farm in 2017 have boiled down to a few things. Improvements to the farm this year will be meaningful to our family and community of farm supporters. This January, Richard and I celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary. In true farmer fashion, our gift to each other was perhaps a bit unconventional, but true to us- a beehive. Honeybees have been an interest of ours for years and perhaps after the health scares and hard years behind us, we wanted to celebrate in a way that improved our farm and made life sweeter and more relaxing. We feel this year, it is important to make time to enjoy the beauty of our farm, and what wouldn't be a better way than sitting in the garden together watching the bees. Our biggest farm celebration in 2016 was making the final payment on our chicken start up loan! This is a celebration we share with our customers, because it was made possible by the sale of each chicken over the last three seasons. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for all of your support! Now that our loan is paid, we are free to move forward with our goal of having the farm produce its own financial security and sustainability. We want to thank everyone for their loyalty, because every purchase from our farm is building a strong and sustainable future for local food production.

This year we would also like to address one other major announcement that was made at the local Food Summit last week. Our friends Keri and Derek from Wilson Banner Ranch have been local pastured egg producers for several years and anchors at the Pullman Farmers Market. While the Wilson family will continue their farm tradition of fruit and cider, Keri and Derek have made the decision to move overseas later this spring. Keri and Derek have approached our family to have Link'd Hearts Ranch buy out their pastured egg business. Our family has been looking over this idea and are hopeful to move forward with a purchase in the next couple of months to expand our current egg production and to continue to serve the local markets. This endeavor does need some financial investment however and so we are looking for local private investors who want to see the growth of small farms and local food in our area. We believe wholeheartedly in the power of a community to come together to bring our desire for a strong local food economy into reality. We will miss our friends Keri and Derek dearly, but we are excited for the possibilities this opportunity brings to our farm and community. If you or someone you know is looking for a small, private financial investment opportunity, we would love for you to contact us right away.

The 2017 season is full of exciting possibilities! From our growing Self-Serve CSA and pumpkin patch, to the continuing of providing pastured poultry and hopefully to the abundance of eggs, 2017 promises to be an energy filled year. We hope you will join us on our journey. We are now accepting orders for the 2017 season. A link to our order form is at the end of this email. You can also find us at the Pullman Farmers Market both at the winter markets the 2nd Saturday of February, March and April, and as a full season weekly vendor on Wednesdays May through October. Please feel free to contact us with any questions! We look forward to seeing everyone for a great 2017 season.

Thank you  
Richard, AlyssaMarie, Joey, Andy and Cora Link

[Order Form \(http://www.linkdheartsranch.com/documents/2017-order-form.pdf\)](http://www.linkdheartsranch.com/documents/2017-order-form.pdf)