

GET YOUR FARM ON!

Blue Ridge Center

for environmental stewardship



News from the Ridge

SPRING 2004

What's New at Mountain View Farm

By Christine Qualls

It's starting out to be a great year – and those are bold words from a farmer from New England! We have a fantastic staff at the Blue Ridge Center's Mountain View Farm, healthy and happy animals, a greenhouse full to the point of bursting with luscious plants, and crops planted in the field and growing strong. We have a calendar full of exciting events. Let me back up and start at the beginning.

The market garden is in great shape this year. We have a new deer fence that was installed by local farmer and friend, Ben McCann. This fence will keep those hungry critters out of the garden this year.

Sam, my trusted assistant and grass farmer, has been renovating our pastures over the winter. We are excited to restore pastures that have been depleted by decades of conventional agriculture. Our lambs, cows and chickens will be fattening themselves on our newly seeded lush grasses--fertilizing as they go.

Over 80 cubic yards of compost was spread in one day by a group of students on an alternative spring break! College students flew in from as far as Berkeley, California, to spread compost and put in a gravel floor in our barn when they could have been partying it up in Cancun. Fear not, you compost-spreader-wannabe, there are many more loads of compost that need to be spread. Look in our Volunteering section for details!

Thank you to Mr. Fitzwater for donating such beautiful compost to our farm!

We are happy to welcome Andy Pressman to our farm staff. Andy comes to us from Ohio and is finishing his Masters degree in Sustainable Systems from Slippery Rock University while he is here. He has a great deal of farm experience that we have already been exploiting to our full advantage. One of the many tasks he is working on now is designing a medicinal herb garden for the farm. Check out its progress throughout the year. We are also very happy to welcome his dog, Emma, to our staff. Emma is a tireless guard of woodchuck holes and a good friend to our dog, Scout



Launching into a new season at the farm.

Blue Ridge Center's Winter Volunteers

Many folks have volunteered over the winter. Dave Kogut came out many times in the cold to help us get ready for the new growing season. In March we held our first trail work day of the year and the US Trail Riders were out in full force to help. We rerouted some trails, cleaned up around some wet areas and did some overall maintenance. Jeff Wilson cleaned out all 95 bluebird boxes on a cold and rainy January day.

Unity College of Maine returned again this year to help get the chicken house ready. They built nesting boxes and perches, framed a storage room for the feed and built a kiosk for the parking area on Sawmill Lane. As mentioned above, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars graveled the barn, hauled compost, cleaned up a stream, picked up trash along a roadbed and cleared vegetation around the historic cabins.

Volunteer Day, Saturday, April 17th 10am to 1pm. Skip the gym and get your exercise with us. No experience required! Jobs for the whole family! We will be spreading compost in the garden, fencing our pasture, and doing other fun farm related things!

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HELP WANTED!

Haven't you always wanted to work on a farm? We are looking for one more farm worker for 2004. No experience is required, but a gardening background and a love of caring for and arranging of cut flowers would be lovely. We offer housing, if necessary, and a monthly stipend. Contact Christine at cqualls@braces.org.



Sam tending to Nickel, Mountain View Farm's baby bull

Old Sam Brown had a Farm

Bovines, Ruminants, and Fowl Arrive

By Sam Brown

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Chickens, goats, sheep, and now cows, too! After spending the first six weeks of their lives in the brooder, our hens are reveling in their new life on pasture. We will augment this group of layers with a flock of mature hens and should have eggs by the middle of May. Many thanks to the Unity College crew who spent their spring break outfitting the new chicken house.

We are pleased to welcome back the Finnsheep and goats from their winter pasture. The goats will go to work clearing the brush behind the new barn while the sheep will remain in the pasture with Copper, our Jersey heifer, who arrived in March. Our surprise addition this year is little Nickel - a one week old Jersey / Shorthorn bull calf.

And there is more to come! In the next few weeks we will be adding several Polled Hereford cattle, a flock of Katahdin sheep, and three colonies of honeybees. The first batch of broiler chickens come in May and will be ready for sale in late June. We will be taking orders soon, so please contact us at sbrown@brces.org if you are interested.

Nature Notes

The Cicadas are Coming!

By Fiona Harrison

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Unless you live under a rock or in a cave, you are probably well aware that the cicadas are coming in biblical proportions this year. Those red-eyed, stout-bodied winged creatures that buzz so loudly during a normal summer are likely to get even more attention this year. That's because the "Big Brood" of the periodical cicada is set to emerge in over a dozen states. In some infested areas, there will be hundreds per acre. The total number of cicadas in the state of Indiana alone could reach the trillions.

Although I didn't live here at the time, some of you may remember the last emergence in 1987, and can either confirm or deny the extent of the infestation. Apparently, they covered roadways and sidewalks. People had them in their hair, and many private parties and weddings had to be held inside. The noise was deafening, especially in wooded areas. It is likely to be the same scenario this year, too.

The life cycle of a periodical cicada is an interesting one. The female lays her eggs in a slit in a tree branch or twig. The eggs hatch into nymphs, which drop to the ground and burrow into the soil, sometimes as much as six feet! They suck the juices from roots of trees and shrubs. This year, after 17 years underground, they will emerge from the soil and climb the trunks of trees, where they will climb out of their nymphal skin and fly off to mate.

Many adult cicadas do not eat once they emerge so the damage cicadas cause is not due to their appetite. The damage occurs when females lay their eggs. This causes the twig to weaken and fall off. Folks who have just planted an orchard have cause for concern and could possibly be in for substantial losses. The inevitable plague of cicadas has delayed our planting of fruit trees and berry bushes here at the Blue Ridge Center, and no doubt other places as well. Homeowners and nurseries are being urged to cover tender new trees with netting for a few weeks while the cicadas are at their worst.

I know very few people who actually like cicadas. They are big, clumsy and not at all attractive. But try to enjoy them while they are here. The next big emergence isn't until 2021.

Up & Coming Events

Volunteer Days –April 17th, May 8th, and June 12th.

One Saturday a month, we will provide an opportunity for you to get your hands dirty. Work with Tim Parsons on archaeological digs to discover how our ancestors shaped this land. Fiona Harrison will lead volunteers into the woods to keep our trails clear. Get your farm on with Christine, Sam and Andy – arrange flowers, spread compost, plant seeds and plants, and create interpretive signs for our visitors. You bring the muscle and we will provide the lunch.

Spring Farm Tour and Timber Framing Workshop

Saturday and Sunday May 15th and 16th from 10am to 4pm. Our scheduled events will be held from 11am to 2pm. Learn the traditional craft of soap making, take a history or wildflower hike, admire the agility of ponies running through an exercise course, start your garden with our own bedding, flower, herb and vegetable plants, hear shepherds spin sheep tales – stories for kids, check out beautiful farm

photos from award-winning photographer, Lisa Helfert.

Blue Ridge Center Bio-Blitz 2004. At 3 PM on Friday, June 4, the clock starts ticking. Scientists, naturalists and volunteers will comb Loudoun County's largest piece of privately protected property as part of the first-ever Blue Ridge Center BioBlitz. BioBlitz is a 24-hour biological survey of every living thing we can find. You are encouraged to attend on Saturday June 5th from 10am-3pm to learn about the biodiversity that might be lurking in your own backyard! Interact with the scientists, help count critters, and see what other teams are finding. At 3pm on Saturday, the final tally comes in. How many species will we find? Join us to find out! This will be a fun and exciting event for kids so tell your friends and family! If you are interested in volunteering for this event, please contact Fiona Harrison at fharrison@brces.org.

Check our website (www.blueridgecenter.org) or read your weekly newsletter for other upcoming events!

Archaeology at the Ridge

The Excavation at Barney's Cabin

By Tim Parsons
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Excavations around "Barney's Cabin" began the week of March 14, and through volunteer dig days and other events, will continue into the summer months.

Barney was an African-American tenant dairy farmer who lived in a small, now dilapidated cabin at Mountain View Farm in the 1940's.

By researching the area around the cabin where he lived much of time, we hope to learn more about his daily life specifically and the lives of African-American people of the region in the 1940's in general.

During the course of the week, we dug over 20 shovel tests--which help to locate concentrations of artifacts--and two 1x1 meter test pits. Although artifact density was relatively low, there were numerous interesting finds, including medicine bottles, a glass marble, pottery sherds, pieces of shoes, and a fair share of glass, wire, and metal.

The most intriguing artifacts were several pieces of glass composing most of a pink candy dish. This is significant, as pink and red glass at the time required either gold or copper to be used as a colorant, typically making these kinds of dishes a relatively high-priced status item. In other words, it's not the kind of thing you would usually expect to find around the ramshackle cabin of a poor black farm worker of the era.

Two college crews--one from Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, and one from the University of Louisville in Kentucky--



Girl Scouts screening dirt from a test pit in search of small artifacts.

visited the Ridge during their spring breaks to participate in the excavation. Additionally, a troop of Girl Scouts spent part of two days digging, exploring, and learning about archaeology as part of their Archaeology Merit Badge Program.

Archaeology at the Blue Ridge Center will continue over the coming months, so keep checking upcoming newsletters, e-mails, and announcements for volunteer days and dig days!

More Pictures!



The Unity Crew planning inside the chicken house



Baby chickens!

Remember to check the website for updates on Blue Ridge Center events!
<http://www.blueridgecenter.org>.

For information on weekend getaways, visit Bears Den Trail Center
<http://www.bearsdencenter.org>.

