

Dear Members,

March 29, 2010

It has been a mild winter with much less snow than what we are accustomed to. Hopefully this will translate into an early spring and very productive crop season. The animals have taken it very well. The first half of the winter was a challenge with the sudden changes from damp weather to cold weather and back again.

It seems too soon to be talking about the next session but we wanted to let everyone know about a number of changes coming up. We are planning to offer lamb in the shares starting (hopefully) in November. We will not be able to have lamb year round but at least for four to six months. The new sign-up form has a "no lamb" option for those that don't want it. We are also planning to raise a few goats. They will not be in shares but instead on the extras list.

The next subject has to do with memberships. We will not be accepting mid-session sign-ups any longer. We are currently at capacity and expect to be for next session as well. Any member that would like to be automatically re-enrolled every session until further notice (by you) can send us an e-mail and we will put you on the list. This will eliminate us having to chase everyone down every session. Also on the subject of sign-ups, we need to know who is re-signing for the next session. There has been a lot of interest with several new members for the next session already. Current members will get first chance at the limited number of memberships available.

This brings us to the price increase. This is a tough one, but it needs to be addressed. We have 3 years under our belts now with the CSA and the expenses associated with it. Everything that we do has been evaluated and potential efficiencies have been identified. Some have already been implemented and some are a work in progress. As an example, we found some automatic water feeders for the pigs that can be used year round without freezing. This saves at least 1 hour each day of hauling water with 5 gallon pails. Buying feed in bulk has helped as well. After all this, we still aren't making a decent wage for our labor. We really enjoy raising animals and interacting with members, however, if we are doing it for little gain then there are other things we could be doing with our time. I'm not talking about profit, just a reasonable wage. The price will be going up \$0.50 per pound for the shares only; extras will remain the same for now. I understand that our prices are high compared to those in the supermarket. We cannot compete with that model of raising meat. We are raising animals with much more attention and in a much healthier environment. It all takes time and is more costly. I looked at a commercial veal raising operation several years ago. The owner showed it with great pride. I told him that I didn't think I could live with myself if I had to raise animals like that. They could raise veal much cheaper but at what cost to those poor animals. Also, we believe that the quality of our products is not going to be beat!

Our plans for the future are very uncertain. Should we continue to expand, or should we stay this size? The CSA has helped support several local farmers. There is the piglet farmers: Clinton & Christine (where we get our heritage breed piglets), the beef farmer: Troy, Peggy, and Tashia, the goat farmer: Caroline (kids), a couple of different lamb farmers: Susan for one (baby lambs), and my sister Mary and her husband Eric (maple syrup) plus Jeff (the delivery man!). If we continue to expand, we will need to include at least one more beef farmer. Rest assured, we visit these farmers and make sure that their practices are in line with our own before we do business with them. We do not intend to change the way we raise our animals or the way we interact with our members.

As always, we welcome any comments or questions (and recipes).

Yours truly,
David, Tina and Family
Houde Family Farm