

## Report from the Field

As is usual this time of year, we are busy bees, planting and trying to complete farm improvement tasks before the CSA begins. The first half of the spring was cool, which prevented us from getting an early start on some crops. However, the heat that followed in early May made up for some of the lost time and most crops are now on schedule.

One significant project we've undertaken this spring is expansion at another property. We purchased a piece of land in Willington last year, and we'll be planting some crop families there in a long term crop rotation plan aimed at avoiding pests that have been building up at 253 Maple Rd. We are de-bouldering and de-stoning the field at the new property, as well as amending the soils, building a fence to keep out the deer, and planning a much needed irrigation system.

Speaking of irrigation, we are fortunate to have a good well at 253 Maple Rd. Most crops we plant are watered often the first weeks after planting. The exceptionally dry weather we have been having would seriously hinder our crops if they were not being watered. The rain on Tuesday, although significantly less than needed, is quite appreciated. Hopefully more gentle rains are to follow soon.

### Pests

The major insect pest this spring has been spinach leafminer. Leafminer is a fly that lays its larvae inside leaves. The larvae, which look like small maggots, mine through the leaves they are laid in, doing considerable damage along their path. Spinach leafminer can cause a lot of damage to plants in the chenopodia family, which contains beets, spinach, and chard. The photo on the right is of a beet leaf, where a layer of the leaf has been peeled back to reveal the hungry little miners. We usually try to control this pest by covering the affected crops with cloth covers (which hasn't been working so well due to our cats ripping holes in the covers). Given the extensive damage we've had this spring, however, we are for the first time using predatory insects to control the leafminers. We purchased *Diglyphus isaea*, a tiny wasp, from IPM labs and released them near affected crops; they are supposed to parasitize the leafminer larvae and kill them (fingers crossed).



## Moo News

Mental picture: a six hundred pound cow is frantic, running toward you, leaping into the air while bucking and doing all kinds of body twisting and head shaking.

This started with the herd expanding to include our new calf Jet, who was born April 15<sup>th</sup>. Jasmine, the mother, black cow in the picture, was our sweetheart prior to having her calf. Only a few days before the birth, we were sitting in the cow paddock, reading and relaxing alongside the cows. Jasmine came over to us and lay down next to us, all of us as content as could be.



This changed, however, and that calm, relaxed, expectant mother turned into a worried, protective Mama half way through her labor. With protective hormones raging, and strong maternal instinct telling her to protect the calf at all cost, she started to shake her head us to tell us that she did not want anyone near her newborn. She gave Sena a push, and did some two-step charges toward us during and after labor. In the first week after calving especially, she wouldn't take her eyes off her calf, and was leery of all humans (and cats) that came near her baby. Fortunately the hormones have normalized since then and gradually in the past month Jasmine returned to her sweet old self. Well, almost.

We have the cows for a few reasons, one of which is for milk. In order for us to get milk, we need to get the cow to build up her milk supply, before we can milk. That means that we want to keep the calf from nursing for a stretch of about 10-12 hours. The cows are together during the day, but we separate the calf from his mom overnight starting at about one-week of age (in large production dairy herds, the calves are taken away from their moms permanently right after birth). Jet and Jasmine are vehemently opposed to any separation, even if it's only overnight, and even if they're right next to each other, able to see and lick each other. At first it was relatively easy to catch Jet and put him in his pen for the night, but, being true to his namesake, he has becoming increasingly more difficult to catch. As we try to corral him into his pen each evening, Jasmine gets increasingly upset. One evening, the whole separation routine led her to perform some intimidating running, jumping, bucking and twisting antics, a few feet away from Raluca. Raluca's response was less than stoic: "I, I, I don't like this..., I don't think this is safe."

We eventually figured out a system that sort of works, in which we give mama Jasmine a treat and keep her diverted in the stanchion, while we slowly nudge and drive baby Jet into his pen for the night. Or, Ed tries to lasso the calf and put him in the pen that way. He's getting pretty good at it.

In the morning, Raluca milks Jasmine, after which we let baby Jet out of his pen, free to be with his mother for the rest of the day. In the evening, the antics of separation begin again.

The ladies  
enjoying a  
breakfast of  
winter rye,  
hairy vetch,  
and clover.



