



The Grazing Post



The Grazing Days semi-annual newsletter

Issue 3. spring 2016

Before we know it, the grass will be growing and the cattle will be grazing to their hearts' content. The greening pastures will also mark the start of our third season on the farm in St-André-Avellin. Year two on the farm was action packed and in the following pages, we'll share some of the highlights. We will also give an overview of what we're hoping to pull together for our 2016 growing season, as well as dive deeper into some of the questions that we're asking ourselves as we continue to look for ways to improve our systems and the Grazing Days experience.

During the 2014 and 2015 growing seasons, our main challenge has been wrapping our head around the new business model – and I think we're doing it well. Although we are now more indebted than we've ever been, and we've had a lot of additional work in building infrastructure and setting up our new systems, there are definitely more opportunities open to us now both for the farm business and our family, than there would've been two years ago when we started this transition.

From a financial standpoint, we are really looking forward to 2016. Since it has taken us two years to build up our own herd of cattle sufficiently to be able to stop purchasing yearlings every year, we have been operating at a (planned) financial loss for the past two years, as we've had to purchase yearling cattle to be able to continue to supply beef to our customers, while simultaneously incurring the costs associated with building up our own herd. This year will be the first year where we no longer need to purchase yearlings. The meat we are delivering in the 2016/2017 delivery season will come from our own cattle. We are pumped to see how 2016 will turn out as all of



our planning, building of infrastructure work and financial investments will start to bear fruit.

In 2014, we built a pile of infrastructure necessary to look after our cattle properly (see pages 2 and 3 of last year's Grazing Post). Our focus in 2015 was fine tuning our systems for success, building more infrastructure, and the beginning of some experimentation:

Building fencing (and tearing down old fencing)

Over the course of the past year, we built about five kilometres of fencing. Since it was our second year of grazing on the property, we had a much better sense of how our grazing systems apply to our new farm and thus where we should and should not be building fencing. Although we still have about 15 km of fencing to build, most of that is internal fencing (not on a property boundary) which is much easier to build and we are planning to complete the lion's share of that this summer.

Building Windbreaks

We aim to keep our cattle outside 365 days per year (366 in 2016). In order for the cattle to stay warm in the winter they grow some warm shag on their leather coats, get out of the wind and they bunch together. It is our responsibility as farmers to make sure they have a place to hide from the wind. As such, we built 10 portable wind breaks that are each 14 feet in length. In the winter, as we move our cattle around the farm and feed them on different fields, we set up these windbreaks where they are so they can huddle behind them. In nature herds would hide from the wind in a forest or behind some trees. Our long term plan is to plant six km of shelter belt on the farm (see page 7) for the cattle to use to hide from the wind, but until those trees are large enough, we will use the wooden wind breaks we built last summer.



	February 2014	February 2016
Land Base	Rented 65 acres	Own 200 acres, rent 170 acres
Living	Downtown Ottawa (20km from farm)	On the farm
Animals on the farm	40 yearling cattle (during growing season)	50 breeding cows year round 40 yearling cattle year round 40 calves year round 40 pigs during growing season
Infrastructure	Fencing Water ponds Low stress cattle handling facility	Fencing Summer and Winter watering points Lower stress cattle handling facility Windbreaks, farm buildings Cold storage / Walk-in freezers
Equipment	Bicycle	Farm machinery for fencing Farm machinery for making winter feed Delivery vehicle with freezers
Customers	250 house holds	250 to 300 households
Debt	\$0	\$1,381,000
Annual Profit	\$25,000	\$40,000 (after servicing debt)

Although it was a hefty investment in machinery, it will take a lot of the risk out of our winter feed production. We're looking forward to not losing any of our harvest in 2016.

Purchased a second farm

When we moved to St-André-Avellin, we purchased a 100 acre farm and were aiming to purchase a neighbouring 170 acres pending government approval. In Québec, there are strict rules around who can purchase farmland and what owners of farmland can do with that land in an attempt to protect farmland. In general, these rules are awesome and will ensure a vibrant local food system for many years to come – something

that Ontario should also consider. Unfortunately the purchase of the 170 acres was denied - not because of anything related to Grazing Days, but because the current owner would be left with a farm (mainly a house and some buildings) that was deemed to be unviable. We are still trying to figure out if there is a way for us to purchase some or most of those 170 acres, but it looks a lot less promising than it did in 2014.

As we received notice that we may not be able to purchase the 170 acres, another neighbour with adjoining land approached us and asked if we would be interested in purchasing their 100 acre farm. Given the precariousness of the first 170 acres, it was a tempting opportunity. The additional 100 acres would ensure that we would have 200 acres under our permanent control, which is not quite enough for our operation, but significantly better than the 100 acres we had under our permanent control. The catch was that we needed to purchase the house and the outbuildings on that farm. In a meeting with our financier, it was pointed out that farms really only come up for sale once in a generation and that we had the choice of buying now or never. We decided to go for it and have managed to secure some great terms for our loan to make payback a little more manageable.

Winter Feed Equipment

As we have transitioned the farm to have animals in the winter, harvesting and storing grass for the cattle for winter is one of our main preoccupations on the farm during the growing season. We had planned to grow and feed hay (dried grass), but good weather is critical to making good quality hay. You need about five days of sunny / windy weather in a row to be able to make nice hay. One rainfall part of the way through the drying period and you can lose up to 50% of your nutritional value. Harvesting it before it is really dry means that the hay will mold. In 2014 most of our hay crop was lost to rain. In 2015 in an attempt to not lose our hay to rain, we harvested it a bit early and the hay became moldy.



Midway through the summer last year, we were forced to go back to the drawing board. Between May and the end of August, it rained every day, save about 10 days. Making good quality hay in this climate is too difficult to do consistently. After exploring several options, we decided that we would aim to make dry hay whenever possible, but have the ability to harvest and store high moisture grass (called haylage) that we can ferment in an anaerobic environment. The upside is that even in two or three days of consecutive nice weather, we will be able to harvest high quality feed, the cows like it better, and there are fewer harvest losses. The downside is that we use way more plastic (to create the anaerobic environment, you wrap the bales in plastic. It is unclear whether recycling is an option at this point in time) and we needed to purchase an additional \$50,000 worth of machinery (we purchased the machinery used. New we would've been looking at a \$125,000 price tag).

C o - o p e r a t i v e F a r m i n g .

Our long term plan is to attract another farm business or two onto the same land base to allow us to share the investments made into farm infrastructure and machinery, as well as the added benefits of the symbiosis on a more biodiverse farm. The second house on the farm and the additional land brings us one step closer to this dream too. If you or someone you know has their own farm business and is looking for land please let them know about this opportunity. We would love to meet with them. More information about this project can be found on our website at :

<http://grazingdays.ca/join-ferme-aube-aux-champs-co-op/>



Purchased Delivery Vehicle

In the last few years, Paul has been delivering meat using a small compact vehicle. We would load all of the meat into freezers on a utility trailer, tow the trailer to Ottawa, park it in a customer's garage, and run three to four hour delivery routes from that garage. Although this option worked, there were a few limitations – the biggest one being the safety of towing a heavy trailer with a small car on icy and snowy winter roads. Also adding pork to our delivery repertoire has made the quantity of beef to be delivered too large for the car and the trailer.

In 2015 we purchased a fuel efficient (ish) delivery truck and we're pretty pumped about the new system. Although parking and dodging snow banks is a bit trickier in this larger vehicle, the safety aspect has definitely improved. Another added bonus is that we've managed to install chest freezers right into the back of the truck, which means that we are pulling the meat out of the freezer right at your doorstep.

Addition of Pastured Pork to our Repertoire

In 2014 we conducted a survey of other meat items our customers would be interested in purchasing from the farm. One of the items identified was pastured pork and in 2015 we decided to give it a go. We purchased little weaner piglets (35lbs) in the Spring and kept them on pasture, moving them a few times a week. Unlike cattle, whose four part stomach can get all of their nutritional requirements out of grass, pigs do require some extra nutrition which normally comes from a grain ration (we fed our pigs an organic feed ration). Pigs are very fun creatures to have on the farm. They are super curious and love rooting around in the pastures. Since it was our first time doing the pigs, we underestimated the amount of feed required and overestimated the amount of meat we would get and as a result we did not make as much money from the pork as we had hoped. The customer feedback has been amazing though, and we've decided to give it another try this year. In 2016 we will be raising 40 pigs and we're going to get creative with their feeding to see if we can make the pig enterprise a little more profitable.



Anouk !

Although not directly farm related (but definitely farm family related), Josée, Paul and Felix welcomed Anouk into our family in July of 2015. We even managed to have a little bit of time together, the four of us, around the time of his birth while the farm was in the capable hands of Jeremy Foss, our summer employee.



Pig feed : Organic vs Waste Recycling

Our intent at Grazing Days is to have everything we sell from the farm be certified organic – for ecological reasons, for healthy food reasons, for integrity reasons and for making-us-better-farm-managers reasons.

Having said that, this pig feed dilemma raises some important questions for us. Traditionally pigs and chickens have played a waste recycling role on the farm. Any food item that was destined for humans but didn't quite make the grade, or was spoiled for some reason, would go to the pigs and/or chickens. Also any processing waste—such as whey from cheese making, brewer's grains from beer making, or grain husks from flower milling—would be fed to pigs or chickens. This was done as a way to salvage the waste and convert it into high quality meat or eggs.

Unfortunately, today pigs and chickens are often fed human grade feeds. The other unfortunate thing is that it is extremely difficult to find certified organic processing waste or spoiled items, although there are a number of local food processors who are not certified organic. As a potential eater of our pork, would you be interested in eating pork from pigs that did not eat certified organic feed, but was used to convert certain processing waste into delicious pastured pork? Let us know at paul@grazingdays.ca.

Grazing Days Beef CSA 2016/2017 Pricing and Order Guide

		Amount of Beef Eaten in Household		
		80 lbs / year (1.5 -2 lbs/ week)	40 lbs / year (about 1 lb/ week)	10 lbs /year (about 1 lb/ month)
Freezer Space	Small (Freezer above Fridge)	Full Share \$883.20 (8 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Half Share \$441.60 (4 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Sample Box \$115 (1 delivery of 10 lbs)
	Medium (Small chest Freezer)	Bulk Share \$843.20 (4 deliveries of 20lbs between October and June)	Mixed Eighth \$411.60 (1 delivery of 40 lbs)	↓
	Large (Chest Freezer)	Mixed Quarter \$813.20 (1 delivery of 80 lbs)	↓	↓

- Every animal is made up of approximately 25% steak, 25% roast and 50% ground beef, which means:
- Every 10 lbs consists of approximately 2 (1lb) packages of steak (2 per package), 1 (2.5 to 3 lbs) roast, 1 (1 lb) package of stewing beef or sausage, and 3 or 4 (1 to 1.5 lbs) packages of ground beef



Grazing Days Meat CSA for 2016/2017 !

We are very excited that this coming season is the very first year that Grazing Days will not be purchasing any yearlings and that all the animals that will be going to the butcher this fall are already on the farm.

This is not only exciting because it means that Grazing Days will once again be profitable this year, it also means that we can instigate our predictable pricing mechanism. In the past, the price of Grazing Days beef has been dependent on how much we had to pay for one year old cattle in the spring. This price is highly variable and makes it difficult to keep the price of beef predictable / steady. Going forward however, the price for Grazing Days beef will be based on 2015 prices, plus inflation.



In 2015 we sold beef for \$9.90 per lb and pork for \$8.67 per lb plus a \$10 flat rate for packaging, storing, handling and delivery. In February, Statistics Canada pegged inflation at 1.4%. This means that this year, we will be selling beef for \$10.04 per lb and pork for \$8.79 per lb plus a \$10 flat rate for packaging, storing, handling and delivery. For example the beef half share costs 40 lbs X \$10.04/lb + 4 deliveries X \$10/delivery = \$441.60.

Grazing Days Pork CSA 2016/2017 Pricing and Order Guide

		Amount of Pork Eaten in Household		
		80 lbs / year (1.5 -2 lbs/ week)	40 lbs / year (about 1 lb/ week)	10 lbs /year (about 1 lb/ month)
Freezer Space	Small (Freezer above Fridge)	Pork Full Share \$783.20 (8 deliveries of 10lbs between November and June)	Pork Half Share \$391.60 (4 deliveries of 10lbs between November and June)	Pork Sample Box \$100 (1 delivery of 10 lbs)
	Medium (Small chest Freezer)	Pork Bulk Share \$743.20 (4 deliveries of 20lbs between November and June)	Quarter Pig \$361.60 (1 delivery of 40 lbs)	↓
	Large (Chest Freezer)	Half Pig \$713.20 (1 delivery of 80 lbs)	↓	↓

- Each 10lbs box contains 1 pork roast (butt/shoulder), pork chops and some, but not all of the following: smoked ham, spare ribs, pork filet, breakfast sausage, Italian Sausage, smoked bacon, or green bacon

Grazing Days grass-fed beef and pastured pork orders for 2016/2017

On April 10th, you will receive an email from Grazing Days letting you know that we're starting to take orders for the 2016/2017 grass-fed beef and pastured pork delivery season. At that point you will be able to visit our website www.grazingdays.ca to place your order. On April 20th, we will start accepting orders from people on our waiting list and from people who were not customers in 2015/2016. The orders we receive this spring will be for delivery between October 2016 and June 2017 for the grass-fed beef and between November 2016 and June 2017 for the pastured pork.

This year, since the beef cattle are 2 years old instead of 18 months old when they go to the abattoir, they will be slightly larger and we expect to have about 15% more beef to sell this year than last year. For the pigs, we are doubling the number of pigs we are raising this year and will have twice as much pork to sell.

We are grateful to all of you who have recommended our beef and pork to your family and friends in the past. Your word-of-mouth recommendations have enabled us to keep focussed on the farming side of things and we appreciate that. We invite you to help us spread the word to your nearest and dearest about the additional grass-fed beef and pastured pork we will have available this year.

Affordability Fund

Thank you, dear customers, for your generosity. Since 2014, we have been trying to make Grazing Days beef more affordable for low income households through our Affordability Fund. We do this by asking our customers to pay an additional 10 cents per pound of beef (with an opt out clause) and deposit that money into our Affordability Fund. This way, low income families who are interested in Grazing Days beef, but are unable to afford it can apply to purchase the beef "at cost" and pay \$7.90 per pound. The Grazing Days income portion of their order (\$2.00 per pound) is paid out of the Affordability Fund.

Here is a quick overview of Affordability Fund Stats from 2015:

The Households:

Total Grazing Days Customers	251	
Customers who participated	168	(67%)
Number of benefiting households	3	(1.2%)

The Money:

Total Money Raised	\$838	
Beneficiary Households	\$320	(38%)
Centre 7 Out of the cold (28lbs roast)	\$283	(34%)
Food Bank (120 lbs assorted steaks)	\$235	(28%)

We have been very impressed with your generosity. We look forward to continuing with this fund for our 2016/2017 delivery season and will add this option to our pork orders as well. Thanks again for enabling us to find creative ways to ensure that our meats remain an affordable option to a greater cross-section of society.

For us, one of the challenges has been trying to figure out how we reach out to low-income families about the Affordability Fund when we don't have any meat to sell. For the 2016 / 2017 delivery season, we are aiming to increase the amount of beef we sell by 15% and this is the perfect opportunity for us to do some targeted outreach to households who can benefit from this fund. If you have any outreach ideas, please let us know by sending us an email at editor@grazingdays.ca. Also, if you know anyone who would benefit from the Affordability Fund please encourage them to take advantage of it.

A change in flavour or tenderness? Please let us know

One of the things we are keeping a close eye on this year is the flavour and tenderness of the beef. As cattle age, their meat becomes more flavourful, but also a little bit less tender. As we are transitioning to a system where we are butchering cattle that are 2 years old instead of 18 months old, we want to make sure that our customers remain happy with the quality of our beef. If there is anything about the beef not to your liking please let us know. If there is anything about the beef that has improved and you like it, please let us know. If you can't notice a change and you're happy – then we too are happy. Share any thoughts or comments you have with paul@grazingdays.ca.

Last year's survey question about packaging.

In last year's Grazing Post we explained our dilemma regarding the packaging of our beef and needing to make a decision regarding a more compostable butcher paper, or a vacuum package that stores the meat much better. To help us make this decision we asked people to indicate their preference between butcher paper and vacuum pack on their beef order form. We promised to go with the preference of the majority of people. The response was overwhelmingly in favour of the vacuum pack. Out of our 251 households, 61 households (24%) preferred butcher paper, and 190 households (76%) preferred vacuum pack.

Variety of meat cuts vs. feeding a number of eaters

When Paul started Grazing Days in 2010, he noticed that it was very difficult for people in Ottawa to access grass-fed beef in small quantities and developed the business around a shoe-box sized box that could easily fit into the freezer above a fridge that offered a variety of cuts – some steak, a roast, some ground beef and either some stewing beef or sausage. We tracked which boxes contained which cuts of meat to ensure that all of our customers received a little bit of everything over the course of the delivery season. Our whole system was based on variety and still functions this way today – why fix something that isn't broken?

Recently though we have started to wonder if our "variety" model still works for everyone. We have noticed that the children in the households we serve are growing up. We can't help but wonder, when children grow up and start eating more does a 1 lb package of steak still cut it? If not, does it make sense to cook two different kinds of steak to feed the whole family?

From the Grazing Days side, it isn't clear how we solve this issue. Do we add a "family" order option to our list of options, where instead of receiving two different cuts of steak, you would receive two packages of the same steak in a box? Logistically that option would add a layer of complexity to our operation in keeping the variety boxes separate from the family boxes, although it would not be impossible. What would be more difficult on our end would be ensuring that everyone receives the same value out of their order. We manage to give everyone at least one package of tenderloin in their 40 lbs order for example. We could not guarantee 2 packages. Would households that order the "family" option be alright not receiving a cut like tenderloin during the season? Would we need to track the boxes that families receive over a 2 year period to make sure that families don't go without tenderloin for 2 years in a row? Is it a safe assumption to make that if this is an issue in a household, they would most likely be ordering more beef than other households and we only need to offer this option on our bulk shares and full shares?

This year, during the ordering process, we will ask you to indicate whether you would like Grazing Days to add a "family" option to our deliveries. If there is enough demand for this option, we will figure out how to make it work from our end, although we may reserve the right to offer this only on our full and bulk shares to avoid needing to track our meat boxes over two seasons. If you have any thoughts, suggestions or other ideas of what you would like to see in our pork and beef boxes, please don't hesitate to contact us at editor@grazingdays.ca.

Questions we have for you



Grazing Days Annual Meeting May 21st, 2016

We'll share a meal and have a chat about Grazing Days. This is part fun and part business meeting. Find out more about the finances behind Grazing Days, help us make sure that the strategic direction of the farm is in line with your needs and wants as a customer / supporter. More details will follow.

Grazing Days Free School / École libre Ferme Aube aux champs July 9th and 10th, 2016

Inspired by our friends in Tatamagouche, NS, we are hoping to host a Free School that aims to be a progressive-education and skills sharing space that offers people tools to create a more just, sustainable and joyful world. We will create a learning environment to challenge ourselves, each other and the powers that be. Contact us if you want to run a session at josee@aubeauxchamps.ca

We get by with a little help from our friends.

Since we've moved to our new farm in St-André-Avellin, a number of you have asked us if we need help with anything. Here is a list of things that we would love some help with:

Brewing Biodiesel: Grazing Days is reliant on two main unsustainable inputs for its normal operation – plastic (for storing our winter feed and vacuum pack around the meat) and diesel (for making winter feed and delivering meat). We are looking into recycling options for the plastic and for the diesel, we've recently realized that it is possible to brew biodiesel from the waste fat we receive back from the abattoir (between 2000 and 4000 lbs per year). We just need to figure out how to do this. If you are interested in helping us figure this out, please email us at paul@grazingdays.ca.

Tree Planting: As mentioned on page 1, we are looking to plant about 2000 trees this year that will become a windbreak for the cattle in about 10 years. If you are interested in coming to the farm for a day or two to help us plant some trees in the beginning of May, please email us at paul@grazingdays.ca



Software tools / Website / There's an App for that:

The Grazing Days website is functional, but we're sure that it can be better. Every month Paul spends hours playing around in excel to manually plan the deliveries and we're sure there is a technology solution to free up that time. Also, it'd be great if the Grazing Days customer experience could move into the smart-phone era. Truth is, we're at the outer limits of our own programming abilities and we would love some help to figure this all out. If you are interested in helping us out please email us at paul@grazingdays.ca

Annual Meeting Organizing Team: On May 21st, we'd like to have the Grazing Days Annual meeting. After last year's Sausage Fest, several people commented that Grazing Days CSA members could assist with the organizing of the event. We have a bunch of beef set aside for the event but we would love to work with a team of people to figure out the details: should it be at the farm or in the Ottawa somewhere, how do we make the event family friendly, should the event be catered or more like a bbq setting... If you're interested in helping plan the event contact paul@grazingdays.ca

Grazing Days Free School Organizing Committee: On July 9th and 10th we are hosting a weekend learning and skill-sharing event at the farm, hopefully with good food and an evening of camping, music, campfire and stargazing. This committee will be in charge of everything from finding people to run sessions to camping and food logistics. If you are interested in helping to organize this Free School, please contact josee@aubeauxchamps.ca





How our second farm house led to *Petite-Nation Sans Frontières*

When the possession date was drawing near on our new property last Fall, the Syrian refugee crisis was at its pinnacle in the news. **We had been reading about the crisis and felt compelled to do something tangible to help. All of a sudden having a second house to our names made things clear.** We put a call-out to the community here in la Petite-Nation and a group of us launched *Petite-Nation Sans Frontières* with the goal of sponsoring two refugee families in St-André-Avellin.

We gave ourselves a mandate, launched a fundraising campaign, gathered donations of furniture, clothing, household items, etc., organized community events to rally more people to the cause, and prepared the house for the arrival of two cousin families, or 4 adults and 6 children. **We were pleased to welcome them to safety here in late February** and they have been settling in well. Due to being ineligible to drive in Canada, they decided to move to town, four kilometers away from our farm, to be more independent. Regardless, the farm house was a great landing space, and made the project feasible.

We are still \$5,000 short of our \$40,000 minimum fundraising goal (total, 20,000\$ per family with a lot of in kind donations). If you would like to make a donation, you can do so by sending a cheque made to *Petite-Nation Sans Frontières* to our farm address (567 rang Ste-Julie Est/St-André-Avellin, QC/J0V 1W0) or by following the links on our website: <http://petitenationsansfrontieres.ca> A tax receipt will be issued.



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Canada Post Publication 42750015