

The Grazing Post



grazing days
www.grazingdays.ca

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Farm Learning : Mob Grazing

During the summer of 2016, there was a major shift in how we do grass here at Grazing Days. Since we started Grazing Days in 2010, our focus has been on raising livestock on pasture – grass-fed for healthier meat and managing the grass to produce a healthier soil and environment. We moved our cattle once a day to fresh grass and gave the pasture plenty of time to recover between grazings. We had three different herds on the farm – each with their own needs that we catered to. We were satisfied with how things were progressing and knew that in a few years' time, our abused fields would once again be lush and teeming with life. And then we heard about a workshop on mob grazing.

Ian Innis-Mitchell is a cattle rancher from South Africa who was an early adopter of Holistic Management and Intensive Rotational Grazing – two methods that we practice at Grazing Days. Ten years ago though, while practicing Holistic Management and Intensive Rotational Grazing he nearly went bankrupt. Although his pastures looked green, the nutritive value of the grass was not sufficient to grow cattle. He embarked on a journey of observation, reflection, and learning from the top grazing experts in the world (his cows) and learned how to manage his pastures and grasslands in a way that fed his cattle, built soil and rejuvenated the land he was farming.

He now practices and teaches Mob Grazing. Mob grazing mimics the herds of herbivores in the wild. The first step in mob grazing is getting the herd as large as possible to ensure the cattle start behaving collectively like a herd. A large herd of cattle cause a mini earthquake when they move – waking up the microbes in the soil – using kinetic energy to shake them into action. If you have ever seen herds of caribou or wildebeests or buffalo – they migrate in enormous herds, taking one bite of grass and moving on, only coming back to where they have been after a full season or year has passed. This is what we tried to do with intensive rotational grazing. We allowed the cattle to stay in one spot



for a day, until we moved them to fresh grass. What is key to mob grazing is that you only allow the animals enough time on the pasture to take one bite off each grass plant – no more. When cattle graze, they start by eating the top third to half of each plant and only come back to take a second bite



off the same plant if all the other grass plants have had their tops eaten. With intensive rotational grazing, we generally left the cattle long enough on a patch of grass for them to go back but with mob grazing, you aim to move the herd as soon as all the plants have had one bite removed.

This does two things. First, since there is more than half a blade of grass remaining, the plant does not need to go dormant or use root reserve to grow a new leaf to start photosynthesizing again (a process that takes 3 to 4 days), but can continue photosynthesis right away. Second, the grass plant starts behaving like a basil plant or a hedge would – trim the sides and the plant grows up, trim the top and the plant grows out. In this mob grazing scenario, the plant grows out and becomes more bushy and over time a very thick grass mat develops – completely insulating the soil, the microbes and the plant roots in the soil from the elements. This insulation evens out the soil temperature and allows the plant to keep growing when the air temperature has gone above or below the normal growing conditions.



A few days after Ian's workshop, we invited him to visit Grazing Days and he spent half a day with us. Within a week of Ian's visit, we started mob grazing too. We put our three herds together into one large herd and started moving them four times a day. The result has been phenomenal. Despite the drought from which many farmers in Ontario and Québec suffered, we grew more grass in 2016 than we had ever grown before. Our cattle were in great body condition going into the winter. Flocks of birds hung around the cattle herd to eat the flies and mosquitoes.

We managed to prolong our fall grazing season by 3 weeks. In the past, November 15th has generally been the date that we ran out of fresh grass and would have to start feeding cattle, but we pushed that date to December 9th last year. This spring, as soon as the snow is gone, we can start grazing the grass left over from last year's growing season. In total, we expect that the changes to our pasture and herd management will save us about 5 weeks' worth of hay – equivalent to 234 small round bales or \$5,850. Ian has seen major improvements to grasslands like this all over the world due to mob grazing and expects us to be able to keep 7 times the number of cattle on our farm within the next 10 years, without needing to increase the acreage.



Vision for the farm – doubling in size

Mob grazing could enable us to keep 7 times the number of cattle on our farm within the next 10 years. That seems a bit excessive. The early results of our mob grazing practice look very promising and we have allowed ourselves to sit with and reflect on the possibility of growing the number of cattle on the farm. Ultimately we came to the conclusion that instead of increasing the cattle on the farm 7-fold, we would start with the much less ambitious project of, by the year 2020, doubling the size of the herd and doubling the amount of beef and pork we sell.

Before we made this decision, we reflected on the goals of Grazing Days and how we were doing at meeting them. To sum up our farm goals:

- To farm using practices that build biodiversity, healthy soils, and a vibrant farm ecosystem
- To produce healthy, nutrient dense meats in a way that embodies respect and minimizes stress
- To support ourselves financially through the farm
- To ensure that we have the time and energy to pursue our non-farm-related interests and passions.

Although we are doing well on our ecological farming practices and the production of healthy meat with respect and without stress, we are not doing as well on financial sustainability and time spent not working. At this point in time, Grazing Days is nearly \$1.4 million in debt. We manage to cover all of our expenses, to pay the interest on our loans, and to pay ourselves roughly \$25,000 (which is slightly more than minimum wage if only one of us was working on the farm and kept to 40 hour weeks). Josée and Paul are essentially on-call all the time and work many active hours. Since we are only 3 years into owning our own farm, we feel good about the fact that we are back in the black, but recognize that there is not very much give – not in the amount of time we have to spare, not in the amount of unforeseen expenses, not in the potential for interest rate increases, etc.



The main constraint we feel is one of time, and our desire to spend time with each other and with our two young children. Doubling the size of the herd will enable us to hire someone to work with us full time. While the work will increase by about 50%, the 95 - 100 hours of work per week split between two and a half adults (Josée is working on farm part time) is 40 hours – which is perfect. Also financially, it puts us in a much better position – to pay ourselves a living wage and to add in buffers to deal with unforeseen expenses and potential interest rate increases.



Grazing Days grass-fed beef and pastured pork orders for 2017/2018

On April 10th, you will receive an email from Grazing Days letting you know that we're starting to take orders for the 2017/2018 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 2016/2017. The orders we receive this spring will be for delivery between October 2017 and June 2018 for the grass-fed beef and between November 2017 and June 2018 for the pastured pork.

This year, since we are growing the number of animals on the farm we will have about 18% more beef to sell this year than last year and about 25% more 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.

Update on the Affordability Fund

Thank you, dear Grazing Days 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 or pork (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 or pork, can apply to purchase the beef "at cost." In 2016, this meant Affordability Fund recipients paid \$8.04 per pound for beef and \$6.79 per pound of pork. 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 2016:
The Households:

2016 Total Orders Received	422	
Orders that paid into fund	310	(73.5%)
Number of orders benefiting	8	(1.9%)

The Money:

Total Money Raised	\$1244	
Beneficiary Households	\$680	(55%)
Dalhousie Food Cupboard	\$564	(45%)
Dalhousie Food Cupboard (Grazing Days Top up)	\$346	

We have been very impressed with the generosity of you, our customers. We look forward to continuing with this fund for our 2017/2018 delivery season. 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.

Affordability fund donation to Dalhousie Food Cupboard.

At the end of November, we heard that the Dalhousie Food Cupboard, which is located in the Bronson Centre in Centretown, was robbed of three thousand dollars worth of meat. Given the holiday season just around the corner, the food bank put a call out for donations to replace the meat.



Grazing Days had the beef and pork inventory available and donated 70lbs of beef and 30lbs of pork, using the Affordability Fund and Grazing Days' own business funds. The donation was very well received.

Although we managed to more than double the amount paid out to beneficiary households in the 2016 / 2017 delivery season, we are still looking to reach out to more households.

If you know someone who would benefit from the Affordability Fund, please encourage them to get in touch. Also, if you have outreach ideas, please let us know via email at info@grazingdays.ca.

Pricing

Deciding what to charge for meat is one of the most challenging aspects of the farm. Do we look externally at the price of meat in the grocery store or what our friends producing similar products are charging? Do we look internally at what it costs us to produce the meat and add a few percentage points for profit? Do we take a free-market approach and charge what the market will bear?

Since we do this for a living, we do need to be able to cover our cost of production and pay ourselves. On the other hand we do not take the responsibility of raising food lightly. We want to ensure that what we produce is affordable for most. In 2015 we took a close look at our cost of production and set a baseline price for the beef we sell that we adjust for inflation each year. In February, Statistics Canada pegged inflation at 2.0%. This means that this year, we will be selling beef for \$10.24 per lb plus a \$10 flat rate per delivery for packaging, storing, handling and delivery.

In 2016, Grazing Days sold the meat from 40 cattle and 40 pigs. **This coming season, we will start increasing the amount of meat we sell. In 2017 we aim to sell the meat from 55 cattle and 60 pigs as we work our way to 80 cattle and 80 pigs in the 2019 /2020 season.**

Please help us spread the word about Grazing Days, the work we do, and the meats that we sell. We will also be selling ground beef, sausages, and hamburger patties at 1 or 2 farmers markets this summer, although we have yet to finalized which ones. We will keep you posted on facebook and on our website when we have more specific information. Thanks again for all of your support.

Grazing Days Beef CSA 2017/2018 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 \$899.20 (8 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Half Share \$449.60 (4 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Sample Box \$115 (1 delivery of 10 lbs)
	Medium (Small chest Freezer)	Bulk Share \$859.20 (4 deliveries of 20lbs between October and June)	Mixed Eighth \$419.60 (1 delivery of 40 lbs)	↓
	Large (Chest Freezer)	Mixed Quarter \$829.20 (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



Pricing our Pastured Pork

Since 2015 was the first year we produced pork, we calculated our price per lb based on our theoretical cost of production and verifying that price with what our friends were charging for pork.

In 2015 we managed to cover the cost of producing the pork, but not really to pay ourselves. We decided then that there were a number of things we could change in our system to improve the profitability of the pork and that we would simply adjust the pork price for the price of inflation. In 2016 we tried to bring down our feed bill slightly, but we still did not end up making as much as we need to continue raising pork.

The two single largest costs associated with raising and selling beef and pork are feed costs and butcher costs (together these two costs account for nearly 50% of the total meat price). Conventional pork is priced much lower per lb than



conventional beef because it only takes 3.5 lbs of grain to produce 1 lb of pig, where it takes 7 lbs of grain to produce 1 lb of cattle. On our farm however, our cattle only eat grass and hay, and it costs us about \$3.02 of feed to produce 1 lb of beef. For the pigs, it costs us \$3.81 of feed to produce 1 lb of pork.

The first year we raised pigs, we fed them certified organic pig feed. Last year, we really questioned the purpose of the pigs on our farm and their ecological benefit. If we feed the human grade organic feed to pigs, why not feed the human grade organic feed directly to humans? As a result, in 2016 we struck a deal with a local cheese maker and fed the pigs cheese whey when it was available, and certified organic pig feed when the cheese whey was not available. Cheese whey, which is very nutritious, usually gets dumped down the drain contributing to the mass fertilization of the world's oceans. Feeding the cheese whey to pigs allows us to return the nutrients in the whey back to the land (from whence they originally came). Interestingly, the pigs eat much more grass when they were fed whey compared to when they are fed organic pig feed. Since we pay for the whey (there is work involved for the staff at the cheese factory) and its transport, there was no significant cost difference between feeding the pigs only certified organic pig feed and pasture versus feeding the pigs cheese whey, certified organic pig feed and pasture. We are still figuring out what we will feed the pigs this coming year.



Paul with two full totes of whey. On any given week, 2-4 of these 1000 litre totes were filled at the *fromagerie*, and trucked to the farm.

Grazing Days Pork CSA 2017/2018 Pricing and Order Guide (Nitrate/Nitrite Free)

		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 \$899.20 (8 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Pork Half Share \$449.60 (4 deliveries of 10lbs between October and June)	Pork Sample Box \$115 (1 delivery of 10 lbs)
	Medium (Small chest Freezer)	Pork Bulk Share \$859.20 (4 deliveries of 20lbs between October and June)	Quarter Pig \$419.60 (1 delivery of 40 lbs)	↓
	Large (Chest Freezer)	Half Pig \$829.20 (1 delivery of 80 lbs)	↓	↓



- Each 10 lbs box contains a pork roast (butt/shoulder), pork chops, ground pork and some, but not all of the following: fresh ham, spare ribs, pork filet, Bratwurst, or green bacon

We have also taken a closer look at our butcher costs and compared them to the butcher costs of our friends who raise pigs. It seems like we are paying much more. This is partially due to the butcher we use (who makes gluten free sausages and naturally smokes meats with or without nitrates/nitrites) and partially due to the amount of smoking and sausage making we do. On our farm, the processing cost for 1 lb of beef is \$1.90.



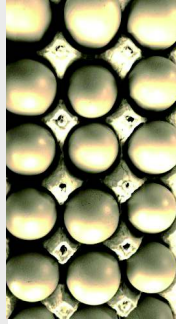
For the processing of pork we pay \$3.24 per lb of pork.

Given all of this, we are changing our pork pricing this year. We are raising the price of our pastured pork so that the price per lb will be \$10.24, plus \$10 flat rate per delivery for packaging, storing, handling and delivery which is equivalent to the price per lb we charge for the beef. Pastured pork would be smoke free, nitrate and nitrite free and will consist of roasts, pork chops, ground pork and some, but not all of the following: fresh ham, spare ribs, pork filet, Bratwurst, or green bacon. We will be selling smoked hams and smoked bacon as add-on items available for order prior to each delivery.



Chicken Unavailable

Unfortunately, Grazing Days will not be able to supply you with pastured chickens in the coming season. In December, we sent out an email to all of our customers announcing that we had found a farm that was producing pastured chickens and that we were in negotiations for the 2017 growing season to have this farm raise organically fed pastured chickens on our behalf. Unfortunately, the farm has recently signed a new contract with a number of Ottawa area restaurants and does not have enough quota to fill their contracts and supply Grazing Days with chickens. We are committed to working behind the scenes to fill this void eventually.



Aube aux champs Egg CSA

In spring 2016, we applied to be a part of a pilot project to raise 50 laying hens and sell their eggs off farm, an initiative of the Coopérative pour une agriculture de proximité écologique (CAPÉ), of which we are proud members, and the Fédération des producteurs d'œufs du Québec.

We were successful in our bid and fifty laying hens joined our farm in August. They live in a mobile coop on our pastures, were moved weekly during the summer and fall, and are fed organic grain, on top of the insects and grasses they enjoy. For the duration of the pilot project, the eggs were delivered weekly to a central pick up location in Hull.

At this point in time, eggs can be purchased on the farm and we are playing with numbers to see if laying hens can be a profitable part of Ferme Aube aux champs in the future.

Workplace or Group BBQ

If your workplace or groups are planning big BBQs this season and you're looking for a large quantity of burger patties, sausages, or ground beef please keep Grazing Days in mind. Grass-fed beef is even more delicious from a BBQ. For more information, please send an email to paul@grazingdays.ca

Welcome to our new employees!

We at Grazing Days are very pleased to welcome two new employees this spring.

Nikki Tesar has studied ecosystem management and arrived in St-André-Avellin from Thunder Bay where she worked at Sleepy G Farm. She has diverse experiences on several organic and direct to consumer farms.



David Burnford has been farming on his own for ten years, and brings a world of practical farm experience to the team.

We're grateful they've joined us and we really look forward to rolling up our sleeves with them this spring.



Important note about spring and summer deliveries

Over the years, we have noticed a trend in our deliveries. As April, May and June roll around, people tend to forget about their deliveries and given the warmer temperatures, we don't feel comfortable leaving your orders outside if we haven't heard from you. We know you pay a lot of money for our meats and we feel responsible for it until we are able to properly transfer care for it over to you. **We ask you to please let us know ahead of time if you will not be home to accept your order and to leave a cooler out for it or to make other arrangements. Thank you.**

Incubator Farm

Starting this Spring, Grazing Days/Ferme Aube aux champs will welcome the first budding farm enterprise at our incubator farm. Indeed, Nikki Tesar and Stuart Oke of Rooted Oak Farm will be launching their vegetable CSA and calling St-André-Avellin home for the next several years.

This allows Grazing Days to become increasingly biodiverse, for the land to sustain more than one farm family, and for the different enterprises to grow in synergy. The herds' manure will feed the gardens, the garden waste will feed the pigs and hens, and the farmers will help each other out. We look forward to working with them. Originally from Kingston, the pair is new to the area and looking for CSA customers. Check out their website— www.rootedoak.ca —and spread the word.

A big welcome to you, Nikki and Stuart!



It was a pleasure to travel out to Grazing Days this winter, meet with Paul and Josée and tour the farm for the first time, albeit in a very snowy form. In fact, the simple truth is, Nikki and I had been waiting a long time for that moment.

This spring my partner and I will break ground on Rooted Oak Farm, thanks to the willingness of Paul and Josée to lease us some land and give Rooted Oak Farm a home. Starting a farm can be both lonely and financially taxing and we're excited to build our vegetable operation alongside the passionate and motivated people that operate Grazing Days. We hope that our complimentary businesses, requiring some shared infrastructure and resources, can mutually benefit from each other's presence and can work cooperatively in whatever way possible to benefit the land which we now share.

Raised in Kingston, Ontario, we met and fell in love while farming together. Cumulatively, we've spent more than a decade growing vegetables having trained at farms throughout Ontario from professional growers of all scales. We are excited to bring Rooted Oak Farm produce and our shared dream of an ethical and financially sustainable farm to the Ottawa and Gatineau region.



As our culture and economy become more homogenized and centralized, CSA (*Community Supported Agriculture*) is the opposite. It is about a personal relationship between a farmer and CSA member. It is an intimate connection between local farmland and your dinner table.

This season in addition to market attendance around Ottawa, we are offering a **Fall Harvest Share** to people seeking a wide assortment of fall vegetables and preserves to help get them through the winter season. There will be 5 bi-weekly pickups, running mid-October through mid-December. Home Delivery is an option within the Ottawa area.

For more information about our farm business and the Fall Harvest Share please visit our website or send us an email:

www.rootedoak.ca - info@rootedoak.ca

613-985-1313

Sincerely, Stuart Oke and Nikki Tesar



Farm Happenings this Summer

Farm Tours

We are planning to host monthly farm tours over the summer. This will mean more opportunities for you, our customers and supporters, to come take a stroll through our pastures, see our herd, our infrastructure and our farm life. Dates coming soon!



Pizza Oven Workshop

We will be hosting a pizza oven making workshop here at the farm on July 7th to 9th. Tom Marcantonio, Master Gardener and community builder extraordinaire will be giving the workshop. If you'd like to participate, please write to Josée at info@grazingdays.ca We look forward to hosting many farm pizza parties in the near future!



Farm Freeschool / Librécole à la Ferme

We're organizing a freeschool at the farm on September 8th to 10th.

A freeschool is a series of workshops, organized and given by participants about topics of their choosing. Workshop topics could be as diverse as book binding and Indigenous organizing, Intersectional Feminist Theory and medicinal herbs.

A free school is what we make it. It is shaped by who shows up and who lends a hand. It is : a space for sharing ideas, skills and methodologies for a just world. Get in touch with Josée to confirm attendance, to get involved, to pitch a workshop. freeschool@aubeauxchamps.ca



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