



Farm News - January

What to do with those 4 litre plastic milk jugs? Use them for curling rocks!

Over the past month, every time I rinsed out a plastic milk jug I would then add a spoon of coloured sugar sprinkles (the kind used for Christmas shortbread), fill it with water and then set it outside the door to freeze. After finally accumulating five jugs of each color the time came to clear the snow off the dugout and paint the circles onto our "curling ink". Since we had an abundance of green sprinkles we made one circle with green and the larger one with red jelly powder. The quality of the ice was perfect if you had no experience curling and were playing against those that did. There were all kinds of rises and dips in the ice (probably caused by muskrats) so accuracy was more a matter of luck than skill.

When the time came for the big game we invited our neighbours over for "curling and dinner" (a salmon my kids and I caught last summer). By the time we made it out to the dugout it was dark and the wind was gusting to 60 km/hr blowing gusts of snow to further handicap the players. The circles were no longer visible so we set up a beer can on the button which was worth a point if you knocked it over. A flashlight stuck in the snow illuminated only the beer can. Throwing the frozen, plastic milk jugs involved a bit of skill. Sometimes they would glide perfectly, sometimes spinning and sometimes they would tumble end over end down the ice.

Who won? Didn't matter! The fire was crackling when we got back to the house and the salmon turned out perfect.

For years we had a nice balance of ungulates: deer, moose and elk. Moose were most abundant and with help from the occasional cougar, deer sightings were uncommon on the farm. How things have changed in just a few months. The deer have moved right in and we have dozens of them wandering the farm and our yard every night. Even our two dogs (Walter the Maremma Sheepdog and Rosie the Irish Wolfhound) have given up barking at them.

A new first for First Nature Farms! Since 1992 we have been raising certified organic buffalo and selling them at the Farmers Market in Edmonton. This month we shipped our first buffalo into British Columbia. "Choices" in Whiterock has become the first store to carry our buffalo. The new market will have a big impact on our bison operation. If all goes well we will be able to maintain or increase our present herd size but only if we rent (and fence) additional pasture or have the rains return to quench our parched pastures.

I have a chance to go on a two week agricultural tour to Cuba with my son. All winter I have had great help from WWOOF volunteers and even had to turn people away. At present we have five people here from Manitoba, Holland, Japan, and France but all are leaving at the same time I was hoping to leave. Others are applying to come for when I return. Chores or holiday? We'll see what happens.

Jerry