

# SWEET GRASS FARM

Spring 2007

## ***On the Farm:***

It was a long winter here in the Northwest. We had 100mph winds with temperatures in the teens and two real snowstorms.

Once the big storms passed the year continued wet and cold with no break. Farmers have mentioned how tough the winter was on their herds. Fortunately our Wagyu came through in great condition. We were a little haggard but that is to be expected when you're having so much fun.



The flock of Trumpeter Swans that over-winters here has grown from 3 a few years ago to 23 this year. These are very big beautiful birds that rarely leave Sweet Grass Farm



all winter. As the rejuvenation of our landscape continues we are seeing an increase in ducks, hawks, owls and eagles. The non-migratory geese had ruined our spring grazing the past couple years. Last year I began seeing the shell remnants of violated nests. My first thought was raccoons or river otters. I could find no sign and began looking closer. It appears that trickster of the Northwest, raven, has acquired a taste

for omelets. We still have a non-migrating flock but balance is returning and the impact to our pastures moderate. The butter yellow daffodils and the graceful glide of swallows

are my favorite heralds of spring. I noticed the arrival of another seasonal companion at the same time this year, the turkey vulture.

**They know:** I don't enjoy moving our animals through the squeeze chute. Part of it is that I know they are not fond of the big steel contraption. Oh we've done things to improve it, rubber stock mat over the steel floor, straw over the stock mat for more natural footing, skirting on the side bars to make it visually calmer, and staying calm and considerate in our movements. Attached to the end of the squeeze chute is the head catch; both these things are what the names imply. The squeeze chute is a chute that the cow walks into and you can gently squeeze her to hold her still, the head catch enables you to catch her head once she is in the chute which helps hold her still and makes her head accessible. The idea behind all of this is to keep both the cow and farmer safe.

Two years ago we needed to run bred cows with calves through to change I.D. ear tags. Things had been going well and after an hour and a half we only had four animals left. Because we were working with animals of varying sizes I had to quickly adjust the head catch to fit each animal. Chocolate is a sweet, calm solid wide mama cow and the herd matriarch. I adjusted the catch fairly wide for her and in a couple minutes after a little scratching behind her ear she was on her way. Violet has a long thinner body. She is a bit shy and I always give her time to check things out. By this point we were all a little tired and ready for this process to be done. Cows and calves were getting a bit restless and mooing occasionally. I forgot to reset the catch and when Violet came in not only did her head go through but so did a foreleg and shoulder. I went ahead and changed her ear tag. When it was time to release her I took all the pressure off the catch I could and put my hand on her nose to gently push her back in the shoot so that I could open the catch all the way and let her go. She took one step back, changed her mind and surged forward; the head catch slid past her ribs and caught on her hips. She was trapped! In no way could she move and there was no further adjustment available in the catch. Violet tried to get loose, couldn't, stopped, and looked at me as if to say "now what". Good question. As I was trying to stay calm and think, all the animals quit mooing and fidgeting, looked at Violet and me with the same question in evidence, "now what"? Over the next 20 minutes I bit back panic, struggled with pry bars and finally released her by spreading the head catch wider with a hydraulic jack. Not one animal moved or made a sound until Violet calmly stepped out, touched noses with Chocolate, and rejoined the herd. I have used that same catch with trepidation until I was able to find a safe alternative that would fit the chute this spring. What a relief! Violet started off the calving season this year on April 19<sup>th</sup> with a strong bull calf and all is going well.

### ***On the beef side:***

I was able to attend a meat cutting class (as the photographer/farmer) that the IGFC put on for the graduating culinary students of the Seattle Central Community College. It was a great group and we all learned a lot about the craft. Our recommended Cut List & Descriptions have been revised to reflect that experience and the feedback of our customers.

There are several new features on the web site including an FAQ page and an information packet that can be e-mailed as a printable PDF file to other folks who might enjoy our beef. Please do forward it. We are looking for a Wagyu or other good beef cookbook for you! If anyone comes upon one please let us know.



I have been working with Washington State and San Juan County to create better agricultural land use policy than what has happened elsewhere in the state. We are making progress. In the process I have come to know three non-profits that we would like to donate 5% of our new-customer sales to. Please see [www.sqfbeef.com](http://www.sqfbeef.com) for details.

The IGFC has changed the wrapping policy and all our beef cuts will now come vacuum packed. This will improve storage life and will come at no additional cost to you. We are harvesting the first week of June with pickup the last week. I will keep you advised as to exactly when your beef will be available as the IGFC informs me.

We have had several customers ask to increase their purchase from a Quarter to a Half a Beef this year. If you are interested please let me know so I can give you priority. We had an unfortunate mix-up in which a customer was given the wrong box in their Quarter. They were very understanding and we both worked to make the best of it. I have asked the IGFC to mark both ends of the boxes in bold marker. Please double check when picking up your beef.

Finally Brigit & I would like to offer our deep appreciation to all of our first harvest year customers. We are particularly grateful to those families who had faith in our efforts and paid for beef 2 years in advance to help with our start-up. We are truly blessed by your generosity.

Scott