

Janzen Family Farms Newsletter

January 2025

Big-picture update: This is the first newsletter from Janzen Family Farms in two years. During that time much has happened, some a continuation of same old, same old; other developments represent change. The farm is still a “mixed grain and livestock” operation. The farm is a C-corp with family members owning stock shares in the company. John remains the president; Chuck Regier is JFF secretary; an informal board of family members meets regularly to discuss and shape policy. Beginning in 2024 the cropping and on-farm livestock feeding became a cash rent arrangement with Rockin D Farms, that is Ben and Halie Duerksen, who live in the farmhouse with their three children Cora (6), Oliver (3), and Samson (1). Pastures and the grass-fed beef herd remain with JFF operation, with Ben doing the hands-on aspects of herd management—checking regularly on herd, water availability, calf vaccination and branding. John, who lives a half-mile south of the farm, oversees fencing and supplemental feeding for the grass-fed beef herd.

DROUGHT--officially declared and somewhat continuing characterize the past two years. Rainfall, crop yields, and pasture growth were seriously affected, and in turn affected the bottom line. Crop insurance saved the day, somewhat. Of more significance were the lessons we learned about Great Plains agriculture relating to cropping method, soil and water conservation, and how we should responded to challenges in these areas.

Sustainable agriculture? JFF retains a quarter section of land in organic certification for alfalfa and winter wheat, crops that avoid the weeds of summer-tilled row crops. However, two years of drought demonstrated the shortcomings of organic farming using tillage as weed control: up to 50% greater moisture evaporation compared to no-till weed control, ...resulting in severe yield loss, not to mention the loss of topsoil in occasional heavy rains. In conversation with Ben Duerksen, we have moved toward the practice of **regenerative farming**, which is driven by the goal of being carbon neutral, i.e., sequestering more carbon in soil than crops and production emit into the atmosphere. Minimal or no-tilling, constant growing vegetation including cover crops, planting in crop residue, all result in less plow pan, better water retention, cleaner run-off compared to cultivated organic fields. We live and learn in a world with no perfect solutions.

Pond repair & prairie restoration: A benefit of the drought was the drying out of our pond, permitting us to make repairs. In late winter, Graber Backhoe cleaned out several decades of accumulated silt (from that tilled organic cultivation). Some of this silt was bulldozed to the east bank of the creek. Clay from the bottom of the pond was also hauled to the farm to re-landscape the feedlots. The pond’s new eastern bank and where the old loop had been filled represented almost one acre. A bit of research and consultation with NCRS conservationists yielded a good plan of seven grasses and seven forbs that were planted around the New Year: big bluestem, little bluestem, sideoats grama, western wheat, Indian, switch: at low elevations, eastern gama; forbs selected from a NCRS list of over a hundred: black-eyed susan, butterfly milkweed, prairie coneflower grayhead, **purple coneflower**, heath aster, leadplant, plains coreopsis—sunflowers, goldenrod, clovers and other plants will blow in or be dropped by birds from nearby prairies.



View of pond from west; new bank fill is dark area above left two spans of bridge to Beaver Island

Grass-fed old-line Angus beef & Berkshire heritage pork. Keeping a third of our land in warm-season native, and cool season pasture, we can adhere to the tenets of regenerative land use and continue our offering of high-quality locally-born and raised beef and pork. Ben and Halie Duerksen keep their Berkshire stock at JFF's facilities allowing them to produce and market several litters each year. See website page for Pork to learn more about purchases, or call or text the Duerksens directly (Ben at 316-217-5498, Halie at 316-288-3262). As for grass-fed and finished old-line Angus (from Torrey Ball's herd at Grassroots Beef south of Hutchinson), JFF continues to market about 8 two-year beeves each year. Availability of pasture and forage is the limiting condition for the size of our herd, and the number of customers we can accommodate. Over the 15 years (beginning in 2007) we have offered grass-fed and finished beef, we have slaughtered between 5 and 13 head per year (and sold some calves as well), with the current level of eight animals being the average. Our customer base has grown steadily with mainly bulk buyers.

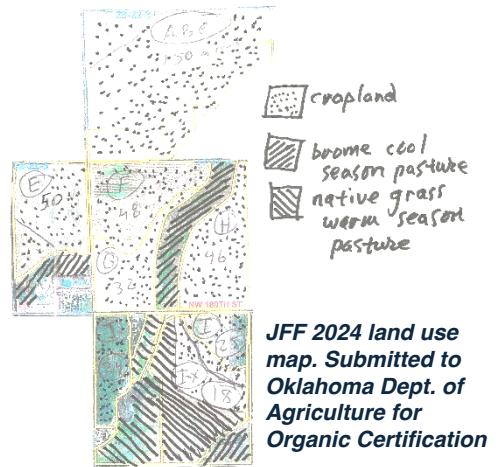
Beef slaughter dates for eight JFF animals at Peabody Sausage House are set for April, June, August, and October. JFF is prioritizing bulk sales—eighth, quarter, half, whole—on a first come, first served basis. So make your reservations in advance with a down payment. Although we will still be members of the Kansas Grown Farmers Market in Wichita, we are usually out of the available inventory to sell. Selected cuts will be available for purchase at the Sausage House, inventory permitting. We will post available inventory every month.

Other farming and ranching news: In March John presented a lecture to a Kansas-State Extension local foods workshop in Hays, Kansas on “Grass-Fed Beef at Janzen Family Farms”. An abbreviated version of this presentation will appear as the 2024 Newsletter on the revised website. This fall grandson Max took charge of JFF's website and online system, including tending to the grass-fed beef marketing list. Thanks to Max's mom (Kristi) for her years of being website editor and online correspondent, and continuing stockholder. Thanks to Max's sister Clara for redesigning the website several years ago and sharing all those amazing photos she took during her “retreat” in Kansas. The website will undergo some revisions by Max in weeks to come.

The entire team at Janzen Family Farms and Rockin D Farms wishes you a rich and happy New Year.

JanzenFamilyFarms.com

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Grass-fed beef in deep winter! JFF's cows enjoy last summer's hay.
Photo: Ben Duerksen after chopping ice. Thanks a lot Ben.