

Janzen Family Farms Newsletter

December 2022



A sign of life from this enterprise seems appropriate as we reach the end of 2022 and look forward to 2023. Central Kansas farming, as always, is an adventure. April to June were among the wettest months we've experienced; July through September were among the driest we've experienced. Fortunately, the abundant rain yielded a bumper first cutting of our new 46-acre organic alfalfa field. Our organic wheat, harvested in June, also did well. By contrast, with rain ending in June, our late summer crops of corn and soybeans did not fare so well. We're still filling out crop insurance forms. A few sparse rains in late October and November has given us hope that winter wheat and a triticale cover crop will do well.

JFF's grassfed beef herd—varying from 30-45 head—provides a strong complement to our organic cropping. Our 100 acres of native prairie and perennial cool season grasses offer a nearly continuous forage source. Over winter we graze them on crop stubble or green cover crops such as triticale, rye, supplemented with prairie, brome, or alfalfa.

The photos below show a recent improvement of our effort to combine herd health with regenerative planting. This small bottomland field was seeded with native grass 10 years ago. In the higher elevations good stands of little and big bluestem, switchgrass, Indian grass, and

Western wheat grass took hold. In the lower areas that flooded occasionally, pig weeds were the main crop. Then three winters ago we seeded these areas to eastern gamma grass whose clumps first became visible after the



patch was hayed by our farm operator Ben Duerksen in early summer, as seen in the light tufts of grass in the foreground of the round bales. By late summer, despite the drought, a vigorous stand of grass had emerged, as seen in the middle photo. The seed heads are visible against the sky.

After the first frost, the herd enjoyed a week of grazing on this high protein, highly nutritious, grass. Experts caution that a beef herd's grazing on this grass needs to be controlled so they don't nibble it down to ground level and destroy the plants, because it is so delicious to them.

Our experiments with native grass and grass-fed beef offer good evidence to address current concerns and inform debates about global warming. What is the "carbon footprint" of the way we are doing organic farming and grassfed beef? What are the greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, and methane) of our operation in relation to carbon sequestration (back into the soil). In other words, how close is our operation to carbon neutrality?

Beef production in general has received some negative publicity lately, as people are beginning to more widely discuss the impact of methane emissions from cattle. Grass-fed beef has even been identified by some analysts (defending fossil fuel) as less efficient than industrial conventional beef, because of the longer life of a grass-fed animal, and thus its longer time of emitting methane for the beef it yields. But if the food source (grass) is included in the carbon equation, grass-fed beef has a significantly lower carbon-emitting footprint. Corn-fed and corn-finished beef require significant amounts of fossil fuels, including through the use of synthetic fertilizer produced with natural gas (anhydrous ammonia), the fuel spent for transportation of agrichemicals, and the fuel spent for tillage. By contrast, in grass-fed beef, the ammonia from urine and manure returns to the soil. Studies have shown that particularly intensive, short-term paddock—or mob—grazing contributes to positive carbon sequestration because it stimulates the regrowth of grasses, particularly the deep roots that are grassland's carbon reservoir. The debates over global warming are incredibly complex and particularly those around food production will continue to be analyzed.

Janzen Family Farms has nine two-year-old Angus beeves approaching readiness for your table. Five are scheduled with Peabody Sausage House from January through June. Like last year, we are offering a 15% discount (over and above our regular bulk discount) for orders received before the end of January 2023.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

As always, thank you for your business and your interest in our farm.

With warm regards, The Janzen Family