

Summary & Resources - Faul Family Riverside Farm May 2023 OAK Farmer Field Day



Growing Pastured Livestock for Soil Health

Diversity of livestock and intentional rotations presented themselves as the primary aspects of Andre Faul's farming systems and business success throughout this on-farm spring event. After a brief introduction in the Faul Family Riverside Farm event barn, participants were loaded onto a wagon for the tour of Andre's pastures and the poultry, sheep, hogs, and cattle that forage and graze there, wrapping up at the poultry brooder and saltwater shrimp barn.

Multiple hoophouses wrapped in heavy duty white tarps and chicken wire were the group's first stop, to see and discuss the Cornish Cross mix chickens (~250/house) housed inside. The birds, started in the brooder for 2-3 weeks, are moved daily (with truck and winch) on fresh pasture to allow them clover and ample insects for forage and to reduce susceptibility to disease from stagnancy and fecal buildup. The birds are never on the same pasture, and no poultry will return to the same pasture within the year, allowing for a summer cutting of hay off the now-nitrogen-rich pasture and a rotation of sheep in the fall.

In addition to moving the birds daily, Andre refills the feeders every day and refreshes the birds' 300 gal water tank (covered with large feedbags to reduce temperature and algae buildup) every 1 ½- 2 days, accounting for ~30 minutes of daily chores. This pastured process is the same for the fall flock of Thanksgiving turkeys that Andre raises.

Through the years, Andre has used Mt Healthy Hatchery, Bobs Biddies and others for his chicks, but is currently collaborating with another local farmer to cut the cost and buy from a larger consolidated order. While Andre's previous flocks of Imperial Reds (Freedom Ranger mix) were better foragers, their longer

stays on pasture cost more in feed and care and yielded smaller finishing weights (especially in the breasts which customers prefer). At 17-18 lbs/bird/day of the non-GMO corn-soy-mineral/vitamin blend (Sunny Pastures) that Andre feeds them + delivery costs, the profit margin didn't add up for the Freedom Rangers when also accounting for the labor, feed, processing, and frozen storage that the final product requires. He calculates ~\$11-13 cost per bird, and notes that the individual cuts (breast, leg quarters, drumsticks, etc) are the customer-preferred and cost-effective way to return the 35-40% profit he estimates.

Following the chickens and summer haying, Andre's flock of sheep include Dorper, La Croix, and Katadhin mixes. These hair sheep (which do not require shearing) are moved every other day by "leapfrogging" an identical set of hoophouse (wrapped in tarp for shade) and water tank over the existing setup and surrounding them with solar electric fence netting. While the sheep are exclusively grass-fed, Andre supplements with hay to keep their rumen balanced, especially during the winter lull and the high-water content forage of early spring.

Although sheep are prone to internal parasites, the intentional pastured rotation reduces the likelihood: the parasites' life cycle does not reach maturity to infective stage before the sheep flock have moved to another area. The only maintenance practices Andre uses for his sheep are ear tagging and castration of young males. He prefers lambing in winter for better body condition, and encloses his poultry hoophouses in hay for the lambs' winter warmth. Overall, Andre considers the sheep his lowest maintenance and highest return species of pastured livestock. He transports them to Trakside for processing at 100-120 lbs.

The rolling hills of Henry County and the Faul Farm mean that some pasture is steep, rocky, wooded, or otherwise unsuitable for haying and easy tractor movement - but is especially good for the rooting, wallowing, and ground-pocking nature of pigs. Pastured hogs at the Faul Farm include [heritage breeds](#), including Large Blacks, Durocs, Hampshires, and Red Wattles. (He previously raised Berkshires for great temperament and meat, but he's lost his breeder.) The "commodity breed" varieties are faster growing and many have a leaner fat content - something to consider depending on customer preferences of or lean or juicy pastured pork.

The hogs, sourced from a breeder for \$125 ea (Andre's preference to farrowing piglets), are on the farm 5-6 months and feed-trained to an A-frame shelter on a trailer for easier, less stress for pasture moves and loading to process. Moves are weather- and pasture-condition-dependent but always includes areas of shade, 4 tire feeders with 5lbs feed/day, mobile waterer and an electric fence barrier. The pigs root for grubs and love mast (nuts, seeds) in their pasture, but feed mostly on 16% protein grower / 12% protein finisher non-gmo corn-soy blend. Andre takes them to Trakside at 300lbs, before the fat content increases beyond the customer preference.

A breeding herd of Brahman-Angus cattle grazes on perennial pasture at Andre's farm, rotated weekly inside 2 lines of high tensile wire and UV-resistant H-/T-posts from Timeless Fence Company. Greg Halich added to the conversation with Andre, as they discussed grazing management having a more important impact on healthy animals than genetics. By rotating the herd, the forage plants maintain strong root systems and the added manure and hoof action stimulate increased microbial diversity and fungal development within the soil. The resting pastures regenerate through photosynthesis and undisturbed growth before returning to grazing.

OAK is grateful to Andre and his family and crew at [Faul Family Riverside Farm](#) for this opportunity to tour and learn about their systems in a community of interested farmers and ag professionals!

Resource Links:

- **OAK resources:**
 - [Join OAK today!](#)
 - [Find-A-Farm Directory](#) - OAK Family Farm Members
 - OAK member discounts
 - [OAK YouTube](#) farmer resources / conference and field day playlists
 - [OAK Transition Trainer](#) - for assistance with, or info on certifying organic
 - [USDA's National Organic Program](#)
 - [OAK Field Days! Register NOW!*](#)
- Suppliers / Products
 - [Mt Healthy Hatcheries](#), Cinicnnati
 - Sunny Pastures, Harrodsburg: 859-613-3939 / sunnypastures@ibyfax.com / [2022 catalog](#)
 - [Kentucky Organic Farm & Feed Inc. \(KOFFI\)](#)
 - [Trackside Butcher Shoppe](#), Campbellsburg
 - [Timeless Fence Company](#)
- Potential Funding Resources
 - NRCS [Prescribed Grazing conservation practice standard 528](#)
 - [SOAR loan](#) - southern and eastern KY
 - [KSU Small Scale Farm Grant](#)
 - [County Ag Investment Program \(CAIP\)](#) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Extension Agent
- Soil Health <> Livestock Resources
 - Soil Health:
 - [What Is Soil Health?](#) - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
 - [What Is Healthy Soil?](#) - Rodale Institute
 - [Soil Health Strategies for the Southern Region](#) - free online course and guidebook - Organic Farming Research Foundation
 - Economics of Soil Health in [Tennessee](#), [Ohio](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#) - Soil Health Institute
 - Livestock Management / Nutrient Cycling in Pastures:
 - [Livestock Systems Promoting Soil Health and Biological-Based Fertility](#) video - Greg Halich and David Burge - OAK2023 Conference
 - [Don't Let Grazing Myths Impact your Profitability](#) - Greg Halich video - KYForages [Grazing Conference 2022](#)
 - [Greg Halich research](#): Bale Grazing and Ecological Livestock Production
 - [Fertility Pastures book](#) by Newman Turner - [excerpts](#) and [content links](#)
 - Greg Halich recommendation: great resource for clipping pastures, building pasture fertility, using forbs in livestock diet; written in Great Britain so climate / varieties are different but grazing mgmt concepts are highly recommended!
 - [Managed Grazing Tutorial](#) - National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)'s Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)
 - [Nutrient Cycling in Pastures](#) - NCAT ATTRA

- [Building Healthy Pasture Soils](#) - NCAT ATTRA
- [Forage Production for Pasture-Based Livestock Production](#) - Cooperative Extension System
- [The Accrued Benefits of Adaptive Grazing](#) - Soil Health Academy
- Livestock-Crop Integration for Soil Health:
 - [Incorporating Livestock for Soil Health](#) video - Soil Health Institute
 - [Crop Livestock Integration](#) - Rodale Institute
 - [Building Soils for Better Crops](#) - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
 - [Cornell Soil Health Manual](#) - Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences