PlayHaven Farm LLC & Green Building Project

Sustainable Farming : Adventures In Cattle, Vol. 3

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Sustainable Farming : Adventures In Cattle" has been transposed directly from the website. That includes references to the PlayHaven Farm LLC and Green Building Project (PHF&GBP) website pages, external websites, links to documents, etc. Because of how quickly things change on the internet, there are NO links from this document.

Winter Big Round Bales of Hay (March 2016)

Normally, I have part of my pastures baled for hay to cover the winter feed (first cutting in Spring and a second cutting late Summer). 2015 was a very wet year with rain so evenly spaced that I was not able to have hay cut at all and my friend who usually cuts and bales my hay is no longer doing small square bales. I considered purchasing his baling equipment, but my tractor is not big enough to use it. Therefore, I was on a hard pressed mission to find small square bales of a quality hay that I could afford. After several days of following leads on-line and through word of mouth (all of which ended in frustration), I was driving back to the farm from the City using the back roads and saw a sign "Custom Hay Baling" and "Hay for Sale". I immediately turned around, pulled into that driveway and used my cell phone to call the number on the sign.

First, I asked, how far will you go to do custom baling of small square bales? Drat, too far to make it worth his effort. OK, so please tell me about your hay and do you sell small square bales of it? The mix was similar to mine and NO he did not use any "icides" on it. He only fertilized using worm casting tea. WOO HOO!! Yes, he had small square bales enough to fill my winter need. Final question, can you deliver it to my pasture? Yes, for a fee, if within a 10 mile radius -- which we are. I doubt that you can imagine my excitement upon hearing this. (It still amazes me, a former city girl, what excites me now. LOL) EUREKA!!

I made an appointment to see the baled hay before deciding to purchase it. The hubby and I were pleased with what we saw. The bales were stored under cover in a water tight structure. The hay was lovely and the bales were heavy and tight. Which translates to more hay per bale than we had been able to get from our own pasture. Our conversation with the farmer also was heartening because he also is interested in Sustainable Farming, Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, and Sustainable Building. It is SO nice to meet like minded people.

In fact, he was interested in either getting a couple of steers he could raise for his own beef or purchasing a Cowpooling Share in our beef. I left the information about Cowpooling so he could discuss it with his wife and we left with the understanding that whether we did a barter of Cowpooling Share for hay or paid for it outright, we would be getting our winter hay from him.

Then, I decided to sell all my livestock, including the cattle. So I called the farmer and cancelled the hay as soon as I knew so as not to mess him over. He was fine with it.

As you probably already have figured out (or knew from reading along at the time), I ended up NOT selling the cattle. Which meant I needed hay for the winter after all. At first I thought I would truck my

herd over to my friend's farm to overwinter with his cattle, but he didn't want the bull there and I would have had to process him or make other arrangements.

I called the hay farmer and asked about small square bales, but they were sold. He did have some large, round bales available still. OK, so that meant some research and figuring out how to feed large, round bales. Yes, it's possible. Obviously, other farmers do it all the time, but they have big tractors that can move the heavy bales and I do not.

Even little farmers with tiny tractors can feed large, round bales to their cattle. I found videos using hay rings, hay caddies and polywire. One of my books shows how to string the polywire and, yes, the plastic rods and insulators to do that are sold at Tractor Supply Company.

The hubby and I discussed it and agreed that a polywire "alley" would work best for our situation. So I called the hay farmer back and ordered 20 large, round bales. The bales were the same quality hay and the bales are heavy and solid/tight. He agreed to deliver them directly to the spot in the pasture where we wanted them (for a fee, of course). It turns out that he has another customer near us, so we are definitely inside his delivery range.

How did I decide on 20 bales? That is a very smart question. Conversion from small square bales to big round bales is an inexact science because some bales are loose and weigh less (less hay) and some are tight and heavy (more hay)... and that goes for both small square and big round. So I couldn't just take the number of small square bales I had used the year before and multiply by a given number. I did some research (I do a great deal of research, have you noticed? LOL) and found that there are general "rule of thumb" calculations for figuring out how much hay a single cow will eat in a day. Here are the calculations for my herd:

"Rule of Thumb" = 34 pounds of hay per day per 1000 pound cow.

My Herd = 3 cows @ 1000 pounds each, 1 bull @ 1500 pounds, 2 steers @ 800 pounds each (the calves are figured in with the cows); for a total of 5300 pounds divided by 1000 equals 5.3 cow units. 34 pounds multiplied by 5.3 equals 180.2 pounds per day. If I were doing small square bales that would mean between 3 and 4 bales per day (figuring a 50 pound bale).

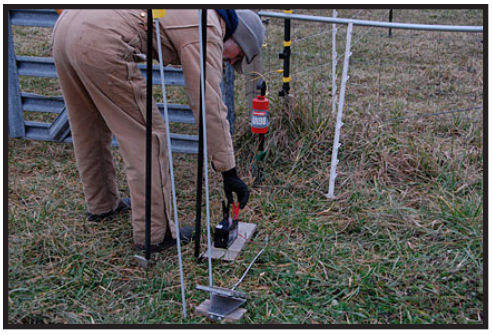
The big, round bales from my hay farmer are between 900 and 1100 pounds each, they measure 4 feet wide by 5 feet tall. He uses a net wrap (which holds them together while allowing them to "breathe") and they are baled dry.

There are different ways to calculate the number of round bales needed from the above info. You can take 900 (the low estimate of weight just to be safe) and divide it by 180.2 to get the number of days per bale specific to my herd; which equals 5 days per bale. Or you can divide 900 by 34 (to get a per cow day amount) and divide the result by the number of cattle (5.3); which equals 4.99 days per bale.

Next you figure out how many days you will be feeding hay. I figured 14 weeks (3 weeks in Dec 2015, 4 weeks in Jan 2016, 4 weeks in Feb 2016, 3 weeks in Mar 2016) for a total of 98 days.

Now, assuming that my herd will go through a bale in 5 days, I divide 98 by 5 to equal 19.6 bales. Round up to 20 bales.

I'm going to share with you the price this years hay cost me and you should not use this as an assumption as to what you will pay where you live. The price I paid was $40/bale and you may think that is high... but you wouldn't think so once you saw the hay and the bales. The delivery was $81 and he made 3 trips because there was the hay and a hay mover to transport. If I had been able to have my own hay baled, I would have had to pay $2.50 per bale and at 360 bales (which is 900 multiplied by 20 and then divided by 50) the cost would have been $900. So I actually saved $19 by buying better hay than I have in my pasture because the bales are big and I live close enough to the farmer.



And on we go to the set up. Some people put their winter hay in their worst pasture so the over trampling doesn't damage their best pasture.

My attitude is different. Put the hay where the ground is high and dry and can withstand the over trampling.

The hubby is turning off the electric that flows through the polywire that makes up the alley and limits access to the hay.

We use a 12 volt battery just like in the summer. (Except that in the alley to the water, we plug the transformer into AC in the garage so I don't have to worry about a dead battery and the bull getting through the polywire.)

This pasture is the south end of the 10 acres where the house is and it is cross fenced with a gate that we chain closed.

The battery and transformer are on the other side of the gate. The polywire goes south a bit to give the gate room to swing open, then there is a corner and it goes east.

Beyond the corner post, you can see the northern most of the two (2) stock ponds that the cattle will have access to all winter.

We started with just these three (3) live strands, but the calves quickly figured out how to get through it and we added a ground wire about an inch below the bottom wire so when they went under they definitely were grounded and experienced a shock. Don't worry, it's startling, but not dangerous.

The permanent fence is about 15 feet to the left (north) of the polywire giving us a nice big space to walk around to the hay without having to deal with cattle.

There is another corner and the polywire turns south before it gets into the tree line.

The hay is positioned on the rolled side with the flat sides up against each other, three (3) across and six (6) deep with the last two (2) bales centered at the west end leaving one flat side from which to eat.

The tarp covers the 18 bales to start and we pulled it back to reveal the next row as needed. Eventually, we replaced the really big tarp with a smaller tarp. Regardless, the hay was covered for as long as possible.

I'm standing at the corner post looking south to take this image of the north side/alley.

I'm standing at the rear of the hay looking west to show the alley on the south side of the hay.

And now from the west showing the east with the trees and permanent fence.

There will be close ups of the polywire, t-posts, tarp, bungies, etc. that create the restriced access.

This image shows you that some of the hay doesn't get eaten. It gets pulled off and rejected for whatever reason and is left to be walked on (among other natural things).

This happens regardless of whether you feed small square bales or big round bales.

In the Spring, we will load the soiled hay onto a trailer and spread it in areas that need fertilizing. Nothing goes to waste.

A close up of the netting that goes around each bale. It works well for allowing the hay to cure and "breathe"; which is important so you don't get mold and/or too much heat inside the bale.

The only trouble I have with it is you can't really remove it easily, at least not totally. I was afraid the cattle would eat it accidently and cause internal problems. Guess what, they don't. Very Big Grin. :)

There is one other problem, disposal. It's plastic and I hate for it to go into a landfill. I need to find out if there is a recycling program for this stuff. Let me know if you know of one.

Polywire photos. We started off using the expensive 6-foot step-in posts to attach the single polywire that goes in front of the bales. The purpose of that wire is to keep the cattle from climbing onto the bales.

Some information I found talks about positioning the wire low so the cattle will eat above it and then moving it up so they eat what they couldn't get to below the wire. Yes, tried that, didn't find it helpful at all.

The cattle will eat the hay they want and push the rest under their feet. All putting the wire low did for us was get the wire broken.

From the opposite side of the bales (looking north), a close up of the rods stuck into the bales with the insulators pushed onto the ends of the rods and holding the polywire in place.

As the cattle eat the hay, you push the rod further in so that you have only about six (6) inches of rod showing from the hay.

The tall white step in worked fine until the cattle jostled them in some competetive eating and one broke.

After that, we used t-posts exclusively.

The poly wire going round the back side of the hay.

Also the tarp bungeed to the t-posts.

A close up of the tarp at the back to keep it low to the ground and "folded" tight (to avoid as much wind issue as possible).

Don't you just love tarps with grommets and bungee cords? I do.

More details of the tarp bungeed to the t-posts; this is the south side looking toward the back.

And this is the north side looking toward the cattle.

It is important that the polywire not come in contact with any of the metal, whether that be t-posts or bungees so that it doesn't ground out and waste the electricity in the battery.

Close up of one of the polywire insulators and how the bungee cord is snugged up against it without compromising the polywrie.

Another angle of the same insulator.

Say "CHEESE!". Everyone turned away from the bales to have their photo taken. LOL.

We decided to leave a rake handy so we could pull some of the hay the cattle couldn't get to off the top and fill in, manger style, the big gaps on the sides next to the polywire.

This was mostly a successful way to encourage the cattle to eat that hay before they made for the new bale behind the front bales (as they were exposed).

As you can see, it worked pretty well to fill that empty area. I will admit, it didn't ALWAYS work when the next hay bale was TOO enticing, but mostly it worked.

I almost forgot, another consideration in the decision to put the bales three (3) across is that you want to provide enough room for all your cattle to eat at the same time.

As I recall, the experts figure 2 feet per cow and so 6 multiplied by 2 equals 12 linear feet. With these bales being 5-feet across that comes to 15 linear feet access to hay. Should be plenty.

Which is another reason we were filling in the empty spaces.

One of the joys of the farm is the view. This sunset was particularly pretty.

In the distance you can see the steers being playful after having left the hay.

I just love clouds at sunset.

The calves are recently finding interest in the hay and while they will push in between the adults, we have been tossing them so tidbits off to the sides so they don't have to fight for some hay.

From left to right that is Dannon, Frank, and Chuck.

They really know where that wire is. They will eat as closely as possible and avoid touching it. That is, unless their hooves are on deep hay and not actually grounding them. Then they don't get a shock and is the reason one of us checks the wire daily to see if it has been pushed/pulled out, broken, etc.

Watching the cattle rip chunks of hay out of the bale is amazing. Considering they have only the upper teeth, their tongue and the lower pallet, they are highly efficient at chomping their way through and pulling chunks off.

It snowed.

I thought you would enjoy the additional polywire spiderwebs that the hubby has been creating. He gets very creative with polywire and posts. LOL. Hey - as long as it works! It is super!

It was a wet snow and so we ended up with lots of mud in front of the hay. Which also means pugging. BUT! I just tossed the “waste” hay over the polywire and onto the mud.

It helped stop the pugging and hopefully there is some seed in there to help get the grass started come spring.

Here’s what we learned from this snowfall. We didn’t create a peak under the tarp.

Next time we will order the straw I need for spring and store it on top of the bales so that it creates a peak for the snow to slide off.

This year, since we needed to slide or fold the tarp back to expose the next set of bales, we had to remove the snow from the top of the tarp after every snow.

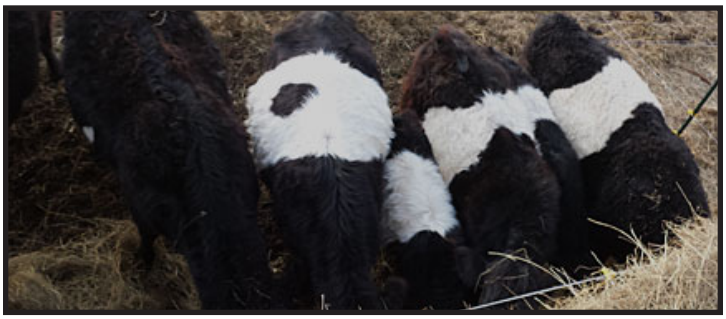
From that perspective, the mild winter and the little snow we had was a blessing.

Here is the hubby using the flat side of the rack to pull the snow off the south row of bales.

He would reach as far as possible from the sides and hopefully get some of the side of the middle bale in addition to the valley in one swipe. It worked quite well actually.

Once the outside bales were cleared, he climbed on top with the snow shovel to get the rest of the snow off.

We didn't want any puddles working their way through the tarp or creating ice dams up there.



A fun photo taken by the hubby one day while he was on top of the hay bales. Not sure if you can see on the right that the cattle have polywire on either side by this time.

I count 6 cows (2 calves between the big belts)

Here is Dannon eating from the hole in the middle of the bale. For some reason, that center area -- on some of the bales -- had very enticing hay. The cattle created hay doughnuts!

Eventually the circle would collapse, but no one was hurt.

We are training Dannon to come to us. There is nothing in the hubby's hand this time. She is just sniffing and she did give him a little lick.

This time there is hay as an incentive for Dannon to come to the hubby. Probably, he found some with clover in it. Yummy.

Speaking of yummy. Here is Nike (with Fil in the background) chewing on some hay.

It quickly makes its way into her mouth.

Fun on the farm. My hubby is SO STRONG. See how he holds that bull on his arm and hand? (Even if it is supported by the bee hives. LOL)

And Fernie all alone in the alley to the water. Fernie stands there often because the cows next door are still cycling and he really wants to be the one who breeds them. We do NOT want him to be the one who breeds them. So that 5-strand HOT polywire fence is a BIG reminder to stay on this side. Thank you very much.

During these times, Fernie doesn't care where the rest of the herd is. Can you see him off the the distance?

The rest of the herd is at the hay.

Fernie has seen me raking hay off the tops of the bales and has decided to give us the pleasure of his company.

As you may notice, he is very excited.

This is a time when we have to be very careful around him. He has only one thing on his mind and everything else is in his way to getting it.

By the time he got to the hay, everyone else was done. Smart cattle.

Can you see that his head is inside one of the hay doughnuts?

Not long after that last photo, he pulled his head out to do some air scenting.

I often vascillate about keeping a bull on the farm - especially when he is like this - but he knows exactly when the cows are ready to breed with him and I like that.

If I didn't keep a bull, I'd have to figure it out through trial and error or get someone to come out and test them ($$) and then have them artificially inseminated (AI) ($$$).

Personally, I think the amount of hay he eats and the care we have to take is worth it. Of course, I may change my mind tomorrow, LOL.

Last year, Button did not get so round so early in her pregnancy. I suppose maturity bring a bigger girth to all of us. Somehow that makes me feel better.

We like our cows fat and happy!

Domino and Frank are still the most photogenic of all the cattle. Something certainly has their attention in this image.

Laying down, ruminating on the possibilities.

Fil (at left) and Chuck (at right) hanging out by the stock pond and a lovely day in the winter.

Steak (or Wooly) carries a great deal of hair all year. He has been taking carrots from my hand lately. The hubby says he is trying to get me to make a pet out of him so he doesn't go to be processed in June. Fat chance that!

And here it is March. The mild winter left us with six (6) full bales and three (3) partial bales left over.

Plus there is plenty of lovely fertilizer ready to be moved where it's needed.

We will cut up and/or roll the big bales down to the ditch to help stop the erosion. Nothing goes to waste!

Portable Cattle Panels with Trailer (March 2016)

I have been borrowing my cattle mentor's portable cattle panels when I need to separate and/or vet the cattle. He has been great about letting me borrow his setup and once I decided to continue in the cattle business, I knew I could not impose on him any longer. Thus, I began my search for an affordable setup of my own.

First of all, OMG it was difficult to figure out what to search for on-line! The term 'cattle panel' is used for multiple products and produced so many websites that did NOT have what I was looking for that I was overwhelmed. 'Trailer' was no help either. Put them together and what I found were complicated snake-like contraptions that were on wheels and folded out that would only work on a hard packed, level surface AND cost an arm and a leg.

Finally, I found something similar to what I had been using on one of those expensive contraption websites... not exactly what I wanted but it gave me the right words to use for searching. The operative word being 'portable'. Now that I knew how to search for it my efforts resulted in very few options and none gave a price, so I had to assume they were still expensive.

You know how much I like Craigslist, so that is where I focused hoping to find a used one. And viola! one, count it one, listing within 100 miles of Kansas City... 75 miles one way, in Kansas. The photo wasn't great, but some people aren't good at photography. So I called and after some phone tag, the brusk farmer and I settled on a day that I could drive out and look at it in person. I took the hubby with me because he sees things I don't and he is the one that has to pull it with the tractor.

On March 4, we saw the thing. Supposedly, these are brand new setups but the tire on one was flat. Plus they were not painted and were made of metal that requires painting. The price for 14 panels (pin and slot), 2 bow gates and the trailer (pin hitch) was going to be $1600. The farmer/seller was busy getting hay for another customer and his hired hand was supposed to answer my questions. I started asking questions and the hired hand replied with answers to my husband. That really irritates me. A bad start. Evenutally we went looking for the farmer and he too was not happy that I was talking to him. He kept looking to the hubby as well.

The big obstacle (besides the attitude of these people) was how to get the thing 75 miles to the farm. It was made clear that was definitely my problem and the farmer did not know of anyone who would deliver it. My next question about payment was met with yes, he would take a credit card but I had to pay an extra 3% to cover the transaction fee.

Wow, what a pleasant experience that was. (Sarcasm) We left without making a commitment. I wanted to scream at those people: TALK TO ME! I own and run the farm! I make the purchasing decisions! I know other people deal with discrimination to a much higher degree than I do... doesn't make being discriminated against any easier. And, NO, nothing would tempt me to do business with that seller. And the search contined.

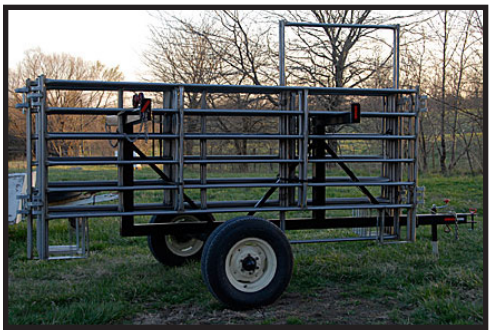
Motivated and armed with more accurate terminology, I decided to call the suppliers I had found on the internet and get the pricing and information about delivery. Thankfully, every person I spoke to was pleasant and helpful. The result of these conversations was that I should figure on $5,000 as a benchmark for what I wanted and having it delivered to the farm. (No wonder the Kansas seller is able to sell his packages the way he does -- they are cheap!)

I was waiting on a local distributor to find out if his supplier had a trailer available (the panels and bow gates were in stock) when I decided to expand my search on Craigslist to more than 100 miles... after all, if I had to pay for delivery anyway the distance didn't matter as much. By the way, this local distributor and I were talking about the number of women farmer customers he has and how we often get treated as second class citizens. His point of view was lovely: A farmer is a farmer, their gender

is irrelevant. Seems to me that attitude works for everything. (It turned out his supplier didn't have a trailer, heavy sigh.)

In Nebraska a different supplier was advertising on Craigslist. The images didn't show and the description didn't say anything about bow gates, but I had learned to ask my questions and how. I sent an email describing what I wanted and that I would need delivery, please send me pricing, thank you. A reply! Hurray! Yes, he makes bow gates (4' plus an 8' panel). Yes, he would make a package of 14 panels, 2 bow gates and a trailer. Yes, he would deliver (at $1.50 per mile). The price for the package with delivery (drum roll, please): $3,200.

I took possession of it on March 20th. The tubing is galvanized, so I don't have to paint it. The connections are all welded and most of them are also pinched.

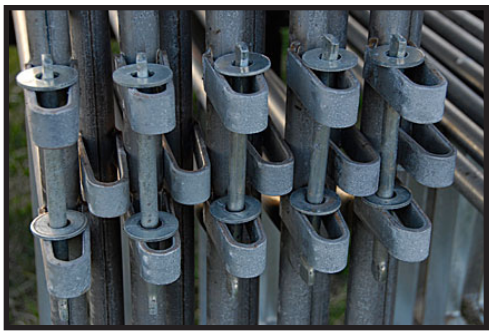


These images also shows how the panels were secured for the trip from Nebraska to Kansas City.

This is the pin hitch. (left)

Close up of the pin and slot ends. (right)

They alternate because the panels are turned so they snug up nicely for storage.



You can see the 2 bows of the bow gates better in this image. (below left)

The panels are considered light and that is exactly what I need for the kind of cattle we have and how we only use these panels for short periods to do separations.

This trailer is designed to carry 30 panels. Nice to know I have room for more.

Shameless plug alert!

Veterinary Vsit to the Farm (May 2016)

Today was vet visit day (May 2, 2016). Calves are now tagged and vaccinated. I remembered to ask the vet to put the ear tags for the steers in their right ear and Dannon's in her left ear. This was suggested by one of my cattle mentors so you can easily see which cattle are boys and which ones are girls (boys, right ear and girls, left ear). The tags this year are bright yellow, very easy to see.

The boys are spending a great deal of time laying down and getting up due to the discomfort of being "banded"; but they are OK and are eating.

We used the new cattle panels and bow gates. It took us some time yesterday to figure out how to best set up due to the differences between this equipment and what we had been borrowing. Worked great! Would have been nice to have a third person, but we worked it out. Photos below.

The vet was here less than an hour. He seemed very interested in our new panels. (FYI, I recently discovered that the USDA is offering microloans for small operations like mine to buy portable equipment ... figures, eh? This always seems to happen AFTER I've gone and figured out a way to do it on my own.)

The herd hanging out in the shade of the trees before we moved them into the portable corral. And below, the full setup (with the cows to the left). The corral is bigger than my mentor's setup. He must have had 10 foot panels and these are 12 foot panels.

The rest of the photos are primarily for me so I can remember how we set it up. If they help you, that's super!

This shows the squeeze chute that the vet's apparatus is chained to. (Uses three (3) panels for this part.)

The panel at left is leaning for the moment, but was chained to the straight panel that it is leaning against at the end closest to the camera. That way the far end could be moved toward the panel at the right to squeeze the cow toward the vet's apparatus.

I'm standing with the squeeze chute on my right.

The pins are attached through the bow gate panel to the holding space between the two (2) bow gates.

They are snugged up to the vertical tubing so that if a cow pushes on the panel from inside the holding pen or the squeeze chute, the vertical tubing would stop those panels from moving out. We chained this as well, just to be safe.

The bow gate panel is actually a 4-foot bow gate attached to an 8-foot panel. We set this up so the rest of the bow gate panel extended to the left (when looking at it from the squeeze chute).

You can see that the bow gate panel has nothing attached to it on the left in the photo above.

I've walked around the bow gate panel and have the holding area on my right. The holding area has a panel on either side and a bow gate at each end. We have the gates set opposite each other (the rest of the this bow gate panel extends in the opposite direction and the gates are offset from each other - as seen in the top photo).

This shows the other bow gate panel connected to both the side of the holding area (extends back toward my right side) and the corral (extending to the left).

You can tell it's the bow gate because of the chain that secures the gate. The gate swings both in and out. The bow of the gate also extends a few higher than you can see here.

The other end of the bow gate panel (extending to the right and away) is attached to the other end of the corral.

Gotta love this pin setup that lets you easily connect three (3) ends together.

No close ups of the corral -- pretty straight forward, pin from one panel goes through the loop of the next panel.

After getting the shape and size done, we unattached one (1) panel to leave open as a gate. We put a t-post next to the opened end and another by the panel to the right of the opening to attach polywire to, making an alley into the corral.

Once the cattle are inside, we swing the open panel closed and pin it. Then we can remove the polywire alley later.

We used two (2) panels to form an alley inside the corral. Those are the panels on the left. The furthest one attaches to the bow gate panel (photo below).

We keep this closed by swinging the closest panel toward the outside panel until we are ready to move the cattle through. Otherwise, the cattle get in that small area and try to turn around and can end up bending a panel in the attempt.

I'm inside the corral next to the inside alley panel (extending to the right).

This shows the inside alley panel pinned to the holding area panel through the bow gate panel. Unlike the other side, this one is NOT snugged up to the inside of the vertical tubing of the bow gate panel. It will be chained to keep it in place. (Note to self, why didn't we snug it up like the other one?)

I'm now on the outside of the corral by the bow gate at the corral end of the holding area.

You can see the inside alley panel pinned to the holding area panel through the bow gate panel.

One thing to remember, it's easiest to set things up so that a pin goes through the next panel's loop. The loop end fits in between the loops of the pin end. Otherwise the loops hit each other and you end up having to lift one panel to sit on top of the other. It's do-able especially if you have some bent rebar and chain, but foreplanning is best to avoid having to do this.

And to follow through the entire setup... I'm standing with the holding area to my right and the squeeze chute to the left with the bow gate in between. Once again, three (3) panels attached using the pins/loops without needing chain.

The chain you see is the one attached to the gate.

This set up puts the hinges of each gate opposite to each other. So having a person on either side of the holding gate works well for opening and closing the gates. You really need two (2) people to do this anyway because the gates are twelve feet apart.

The corral and holding area from the other side. I was busy when the vet was here, so I didn't get any photos of the cattle going through the setup.

It really works well though. The hubby had another set of polywire strung as an alley from the vet's apparatus to the next pasture allotment. (Stirrup posts worked well to move it in place and then out of the way when he was ready to leave.)

If the cow that got into the holding area was not being vetted, we just opened everything up (except the gate to the corral, of course) and that cow went into the pasture.

If the cow was being vetted, the vet held the gate to the apparatus open until the cow was in place and then closed it catching them in place to do what was necessary.

Repeat the release and capture process until all the cows are back in the pasture.

Here they are, all finished. The experience not entirely forgotten (especially by the soon-to-be-steers) but tolerated.

By the way, Fernie didn't want to go into the corral and we were OK with that, he was not being vetted. So we opened the allotment to him once the rest of the cattle were in the corral. He enjoyed finding the best bits in the pasture without competition.

The Momma cows did hang around near the vet's apparatus after being released, but were not too much of a bother... just keeping an eye on their calves. We could have put up a barrier to keep them away... it really wasn't necessary.

Weaning (May 2016)

Saturday, May 14, 2016: and so it begins. Weaning. I posted this on Facebook the same day, boy was I courageous to flirt with jinxing the start date and, you guessed it, had to start the count over on Sunday because Frank (Domino's calf) somehow made it back to her and was in with the Mommas on Sunday morning. He must have had a milk breakfast, because he was very docile and easily moved to go back with Fernie and the other calves.

Since we have the equipment, we used the portable cattle panels to separate everyone. Being only a couple weeks since the last use, this was also rather courageous of us because cattle have good memories. The calves weren't too happy about going into the corral and were even less happy about leaving it... they were the last ones in there. This actually made it easier because once everyone else was settled, we just set the opening to go in with Fernie and Steak and opened both gates up and "pushed" them through. They raced out into the field and did some happy dance kicking. LOL

We separated the calves, Fernie and Steak into one area and the cows plus Filet into the other around 10 am on Satuday.

While there has been some frustration by Domino and Frank (wow, was not familiar with his bellow until now), over all it's been amazingly quiet. Actually, the Mommas are acting like they are on vacation, LOL. They spend very little time 'mooning' over the calves and most of the time under the trees lounging or eating from the hay (what's left of the overwinter stock that hasn't made it's way to the ditch yet). They are LOVING that hay!

We are weaning about a month later than last year and so the calves are older than the calves were last year. We can only assume that the Mommas (bar Domino) had already begun the weaning process.

It's been a week now and tomorrow everyone gets to go into the same pasture. Oh, in case you are wondering and did not read the weaning from 2015...

We like to use the pasture south of the house so we can use binoculars to see everybody during the week. The hubby puts up a six-strand fence using t-posts primarily and has a ground line at the bottom, then a live line an inch or so above it, then a few inches above that another live line and about an inche above that another ground line which leaves another live line several inches above that and at last a live line at head height of the adults. This goes south from the permanent fence all the way to the end of our property and the Mommas go on the side that has the permanent fence to the east and calves (et al) go in the area that is to the west of the six-strand fence. They continue with new allotments each day because the big area is crossed with polywire going east/west. This is a time when we don't close the area behind them. For weaning, we deal with them having access to the area around the water and minerals for a full week. And, yes, each area has it's own water trough and minerals. We also go ahead and put the Basic H into the water to de-worm at this time.

It worked great last year and (except for Frank getting through we know not how) again this year. No trouble after Saturday night.

As I write this, it is Saturday morning and we are sure it will be OK to put everyone back together again on Sunday. Heavy sigh.

JUNE UPDATE. It appears that we have had a weaning failure when it comes to Domino's boy (Frank) and we know this because we have seen him suckling. One of our mentors DID tell us some time back that males try to suckle again after weaning and, usually, the cow doesn't accept them. It's not as though he only suckles... and we're pretty sure that when Domino has her new calf, she will deal with him. Always a learning experience on the farm.

Nike's Heifer Calf (June 2016)

If you follow us on Facebook, you already know that Nike gave birth to a heifer calf on June 14th! Here is that post: A suprise! The hubby went out a bit before noon to give fresh water to the cattle and found this little package in the pasture... Nike had her calf! Wow, that means Nike was rebred 4 weeks after her last calf. The hubby was able to check the umbilical cord (didn't dip this one) and was uncertain about the sex... no obvious genitilia (so probably a girl, we'll have to use the "pee test" to confirm).

Nike didn't clean up the afterbirth, but did move the calf away and into the shade.

(and later...) The hubby was able to determine the gender: it's a GIRL!

Here is Nike's "off-side" (no swish) with the new calf next to her. Moving to afternoon shad on the other side of the pasture.

Calves have to be able to keep up with the herd from the first few hours after birth. Thank goodness for mom's milk! It provides an energy boost.

This and the following photos are by the hubby.

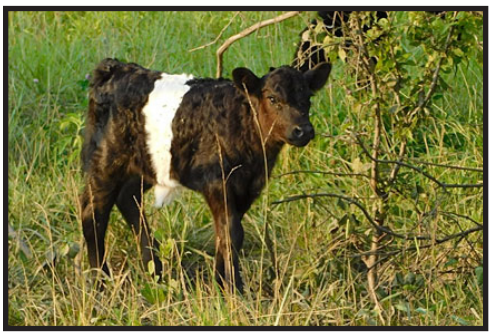
This is later in the day. The calf decided to go exploring and Nike is obviously not happy about her calf being so far from her side at this age.

Nike would really rather be in the shade with the rest of the herd... can you see them under the trees?

Just like the first child, we tend to take more photos of the first calf each year.

They are just SO darned cute!

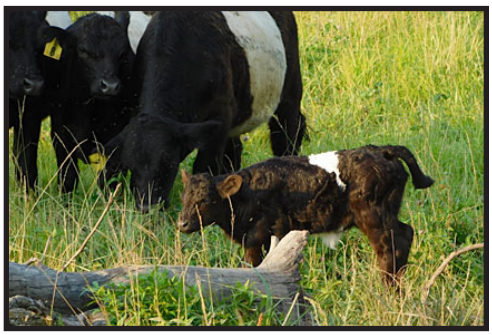
Plus, the hubby has a new camera... and it has wicked zoom capabilities!



No, we haven't named her yet.

I'd like to see what gender the other calves are before naming them this year.

A close-up of "off-side" to show where the belt begins and ends.



Dannon Goes to Her New Home (June 2016)

As you may know, I had planned to keep Dannon. She is out of Button and has the same easy-going temperament... just what we want in a breeding cow. The trouble is I don't want to breed her back to her father and that meant one of three things:

- Build a bull pen and separate Fernie from the rest of the herd.
- Send Fernie to processing with the steers (or sell him) and buy a new bull.
- Sell Dannon.

I decided to sell Dannon. I contacted Worstell Farms to see if they would be interested and (thankfully) they were. There aren't any photos of her leaving. Even though I know she now lives on a great farm with her sister (Vickie) and will make friends with the cows there, it was hard on me to see her leave.

We set up the temporary corral in the deep, morning shade and were able to separate her and Button relatively easily from the rest of the herd and into the corral. Button was released back to the herd and Dannon waited for her ride in cool comfort. She was nervous about being in the corral, but the water was right by it and the rest of the herd waited there next to her until the trailer backed up to the corral. She loaded quickly and off they went. Then I went into the house and cried.

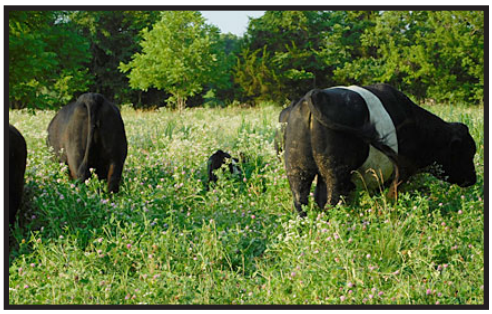
One of the reasons I'm waiting to name Nike's calf is because I used the name "Dannon" on a heifer I thought was going to stay. I don't want to use a favorite name on a calf that will be leaving. So, if we end up with three (3) heifers, I'll use favorite names and will be sending Fernie off to processing before they are old enough to be bred. If we get two (2) bull calves, I'll pick a some name that I am not attached to cuz I'll know she will be leaving. Farming has it's ups and downs... just like me.

Moving to Fresh Pasture (June 2016)

This image was taken on the Summer Solstice.

This is what fresh pasture looks like. Lots of grass, clover, and other plants... a variety of yummy food for ruminants like cattle. The cattle had been through this area about two months ago.

The same group in the same pasture, but from a different point of view. We find that the cattle don't start munching at the edge where the polywire has been taken down. Instead they meander far into the area and start making a circuit around the area outside to inside. Not always, of course... who wants to be that predictable? LOL



The proverbial "butt shot". While not the most attractive perspective, it is nice to confirm that our cattle have relatively clean behinds. See the black thing between the cows? That is the new calf. The food is so thick and high, you can barely see her. She has already started to nibble on the tender bits. Nike's calf has also started to figure out the polywire. She has started laying on the wrong side (she doesn't 'ground' like the adults and so doesn't get much of a shock) away from Nike. Last night Nike was bellowing in a very insistent way and when the hubby went to investigate, he found the calf ignoring the call to come. His presence was the stimulation she needed to go to mom. I think Nike was calling for the hubby to deal with her calf. LOL

Button's Bull Calf (July 2016)

On July 13, 2016, Button had her calf during a noon thunderstorm! The hubby had gone down to check on the cattle after the storm blew through and found the new addition. Momma and calf were fine. It has a full belt. We were not able to identify its gender at that time.
But now we know that IT IS A BOY.

The hubby was nervous about it being so close to the stock pond, so he asked me to help get Button and the calf up into the pasture. This is why we were able to get photos of it newly born.

Button had licked the calf and disposed of the air sac, but as you can see from the photo, the afterbirth was not ejected yet.

(FYI, what you can see is just a tiny portion of what Button still has to "deliver". She did get it out a bit later up in the pasture where we moved them to.)

The calf was still a bit unsteady on its feet, so Gary lifted it and I used my staff to remind Button that she should not follow too closely (I just used it as a barrier, not a club.)

We got to the other side of the pond and Gary put the calf down. Button could see the other cattle eating grass and lead the calf up into the nice fresh pasture. It immediately found a deep area of clover and laid down to nap.

Button stood guard and then lay by it. We saw the calf suckle later in the day. The rest of the herd kept their distance.

Several months ago, Gary came across a great animation of a pregnant cow talking about how she doesn't want the farmer messing with her newborn calf and how she is going to hide it. Here is the link so you can see it ... it's on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Ashdale4/videos/836508036401234/

I am sharing that with you here because after we bothered Button so soon after giving birth, she has been doing EXACTLY what the cow on the video describes. We spent the first few days hunting through the tall grass looking for it's sleeping spots. I'm sure I could hear her laughing at us. LOL.

Oh, oddly enough, Button did not clean up her afterbirth this time. I'm thinking it was another protest because of us interfering. The rest of the herd had headed to the pond and we saw the Turkey Vultures hanging out where the calf had been laying originally. The calf was not with Button and Button was very alert... so we headed down to be sure the calf was alive and found the afterbirth. The hubby removed it and that was the first of the several times we searched for the calf. It was quite a ways outside of the polywire pasture allotment and in deep grass, sound asleep. This worked out well for us, because we were able to look it over and determine the sex without fear of Button or the other cows coming after us.

A lucky shot of the new calf the next day heading for food.

The herd lounging and ruminating (except for Button who is catching up! LOL).

It certainly didn't take long for the two (2) calves to start hanging out together and playing.

The hubby is certainly getting lots of practice with his new camera! What a lovely image of Button's bull calf!

And finally (for now), a tender moment between Button and the calf.

Personally, I think she's saying "hey, lots of milk here! how about you get on that?" LOL.

Domino's Heifer Calf (Aug 2016)

The hubby and I kept saying to each other "Domino sure looks ready to give birth" every day for the last week or so, and... VIOLA! On Sunday, August 7, 2016, at around 6 PM, Domino gave birth to a healthy calf with a full belt.

The hubby was making regular trips to check on her over the last several days and this time he came back in with the good news. As you can see, she very quickly cleaned up the calf and it was already looking for its first meal.

Once it had some milk, Domino lead it up the pasture to join the rest of the herd for the night.

The following image is the next morning. I heard Domino bellowing while I was taking care of the cats' food etc. So (with camera in hand), I headed toward the cattle. Everyone had come up to get water and Domino was hanging back, still bellowing.

As I watched, she turned around and headed back the way they had come, bellowing and obviously searching. I was able to get into the pasture and follow her most of the way before the rest of the herd started to catch me up. I quickly went over the polywire and made my way the rest of the way through the tall plants. Using Domino as a barometer, I was able to discover the calf in the same area where I was.

Unfortunately, the little thing woke up enough as I took the photo to jump up as I tried to check the gender.

No, I didn't catch the calf -- fast little critters! Domino bellowed again and I followed the calf (like a predator would) as it made its way under the polywire and back to the safety of the herd.

That should teach the calf to come when Domino calls!

I loved how the herd came over to see if the calf was OK. (It's the bit of white in between those three big heads.)

Wow, this area sure has a lot of Queen Anne's Lace (Daucus carota)! So pretty and edible!

The hubby was able to catch the calf asleep a little later on this day and determined that it is a GIRL.

Two (2) girls and one (1) boy... oh dear, that means I have to make some big decisions about who will stay and who will go next Spring. Now I have to come up with names.... Nike's calf became Juno (born in June), Button's calf became Prime Rib (Primo, for short), and Domino's calf was name Aggie (born in August). Not all that imaginative this year, I'm afraid.