

News from the CJR Farm

The 2015 Year in Review

As winter descends into spring's embrace, we are happy to take time to reflect on the past year's accomplishments in agricultural science and to look forward to the 2016 growing season.

In early January of 2015, our students were immediately immersed in preparing for the arrival of our first newborns of the year. Cattle were the first expected, and they did not disappoint. Three purebred Angus babies were born in a span of four days: Two males and one female, all born healthy and all three from first time "mamas." The CJR students did a fantastic job with post-natal care, assuring good health for our cows and a great start for the three newborn calves.



A pleasant surprise occurred on the 3rd of February, as our cow Bella gave birth to twin bull calves! Each calf weighed 60 - 70 pounds, so Bella had her work cut out for her. The calves were born unassisted and with a little encouragement from our students, they were up and nursing in no time at all. This was only the second set of twin calves born at CJR in the past 23 years!

During the first several weeks of the new semester, our students were also acquiring new skills in maple production, forest management, and firewood production. With a growing number of maple trees to be tapped, the boys had much to learn about the fundamentals of maple sugaring. Students spent a lot of the time in the woods, clearing debris from lines, checking for vacuum leaks and tapping trees. More than 700 taps were installed for sap collection! Mother Nature gave us a real workout as the snowfall was heavy in 2015, and toiling in the woods was especially challenging.

March saw the arrival of two more bull calves, born to Hereford mothers, Lexi and Reign, as well as five lambs, delivered by ewes, Cotton, Star and Charcoal. Charcoal delivered twins and required a bit of assistance from the farm team. After a slight redirection and pull of the second lamb, all was well. Two esophageal tube feedings later, the second twin was good to go and Charcoal did the rest, with regard to his care and nursing. Our cow, Reign was carrying a potential "genetic superstar," as her embryo was from one of the legendary cows in the Hereford breed. Anticipation was high as the birth of a heifer could advance the genetic pool of the CJR herd significantly. The birth of a bull would give us a healthy but less important calf for sale or auction. For a moment, when the calf was emerging, we thought it was a female. Optimism proved to be fleeting, however, as it turned out to be a bull calf. Such are the breaks associated with even the most planned births! This has certainly not dampened our hopes for a heifer in 2016.



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Two sets of kid goats were also born in March. While we all think kid goats are totally “awesome,” no one dreamed that word of their arrival could spread so fast. We had so many visitors – both from on campus and off campus – that it was overwhelming at times. It just goes to show that cute goes a long way!

April was a calm month for births, but we were no less busy. The maple season was a success with much sap harvested from the 700 trees tapped; the firewood shed was full to the brim; and the long winter was gradually letting go of its hold. Finally – there was some light at the end of the tunnel – signifying welcome signs of spring. The students had worked hard as a team to solve problems all winter long and to keep the facilities in good operation and our animals healthy and safe. The sunshine and warm weather sparked a very positive outlook for the culmination of the school year.

In the month of May, equipment was readied for garden and crop production. Plants were started in the green house and we made accommodations for our last cow to calve and doe to kid. On May 11th, our Nigerian Dwarf Goat, Snowy, gave birth to triplets. This was her third set in as many years. A brother and sister remain at CJR, answering to the names of Thor and Storm. These names were selected via a naming contest conducted on CJR’s Facebook page.

May also brought us baby Ivy – a stylish, fancy heifer with loads of potential – from our matriarch Hereford cow, Claribelle. Claribelle now has three daughters in the herd – all show quality heifers that will make good mothers. Thanks to her impeccable lineage and ability to pass on good breeding, Claribelle is, without question, the most influential cow in CJR’s history.

Forty piglets were born over a two week period in June. More visitors came to the farm to enjoy these little guys, who were second only to kid goats in popularity. Some of the students were very involved in birthing the litter of one sow, which had ten babies. Delivery, nursing, cutting umbilical cords, and giving shots were all a part of their responsibilities.

Hay production started in June. It was good to finally start haying as the weather had slowed things down a bit. The gardens were planted with over 800 plants of many different varieties, selected with a focus on fall-related items, such as decorative squash, pumpkins and chrysanthemums. Classes from both the CJR School and from CJR’s Torrington community program participated in this major undertaking.

Our 2015 Graduation and Achievement Day Ceremony was a terrific event. The staff had a fantastic time applauding CJR’s young men as they accepted awards and diplomas that they had earned throughout the year.

Three students shared the Sue B. Hart Award in recognition of their outstanding achievement in the Agricultural Science Program. The entire CJR School was exceptionally proud of the accomplishments of these students. I was beaming and so pleased to be able to present them with this award for their efforts.

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After a short break, we resumed haying. It was an abundant harvest and our students toiled diligently to bring in the crop. By September's end we had more than 4,500 bales of hay for our animals! Over the summer, Promise, our yearling Hereford heifer, and Banner, one of the twin Hereford bull calves, were trained, groomed, washed, and trimmed, so they would be at their very best for the Goshen Fair.

Promise and Banner were shown Labor Day Weekend by Jon, one of the young men honored at graduation for his remarkable skills on the farm. He garnered Bull Calf Champion of the Hereford show with Banner. Both animals and Jon showed in classes throughout the weekend and CJR was represented by quality livestock and high levels of professionalism and commitment were demonstrated by our students.

CJR's Angus consignment sale entries, including one cow/calf pair and a yearling heifer named Jenny, were also given significant attention. The boys put these three through a "make-over" for their big pictorial in magazines and sales catalogs, and they certainly looked grand. All the hard work and good feed paid off, as the CJR cattle were among the top sellers at the sale! We are excited that CJR's Angus and Hereford cattle are being recognized for quality and performance by our fellow breeders.

The CJR vegetable garden provided our chefs and culinary students with a bountiful supply of fresh produce throughout the summer and into the fall. Many delicious meals were shared by CJR staff and students, and a "farm to table" experience was part of nearly every meal.

When school opened for the fall semester, much of our focus and effort turned to garden harvest, event preparation, and semi-annual vaccination procedures. Winter preparations were soon underway as students repaired and maintained equipment, as well as the barns, so everything could be in top shape.

Literally tons of produce were harvested for CJR's farm market opening, which coincides with the *Cars for Kids* Automobile Show on Columbus Day Weekend. The market enjoyed two weekends of brisk sales as well as many private sales. The students worked hard and had an opportunity to practice their customer service, marketing, and teamwork skills. Most satisfying was our ability to help many other people and organizations by donating extra produce to local causes which serve the homeless and the hungry. Our hard work created an opportunity to provide a valuable contribution to the community. The lessons students learn at CJR about the importance of giving back are very powerful. While they cannot be fully measured, the benefits of such lessons can be clearly observed and are always meaningful and appreciated.





As we wound down for the holidays, we kept a keen eye on our first batch of Tilapia – the first product of our fish farming enterprise. The learning curve was steep, but my colleague and campus fish expert, Mr. Rey Budny, along with his students, led us boldly through the establishment of this new venture and we had much success. The CJR Fish Farm – made possible by a generous grant – is now populated by spawning Tilapia which are producing the next generation and harvest for this endeavor.

End of year events included one unique embryo transfer into our Hereford cow, Reign. The uniqueness resided in the fact that the embryo was the rarest of an in-vitro fertilization, which was identified pre-transfer as a female. Everyone had their fingers crossed for a sustainable pregnancy by Christmas. It was a great gift to hear the embryo fertilization was successful and our new heifer calf is expected this spring!

Holiday wreaths and poinsettias were produced for our traditional holiday sale, which goes on throughout December. The 2015 poinsettias were the largest and healthiest we have ever produced, all developed from tiny “plugs” – some harvested from our own “mother plants.”

As you read this summary, we hope you are reminded of how much young people can accomplish at CJR. With the right opportunities and encouragement, they turn what were once only dreams into reality. We thank our friends and supporters for helping us provide these opportunities and look forward to a very successful 2016.

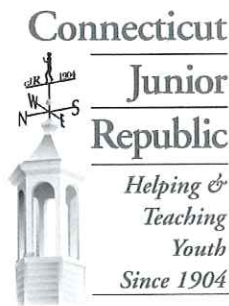
Eric

Eric Elwell
CJR Animal Science Instructor
and Farm Manager



CJR's Vocational Agriculture Program includes Animal and Plant Science classes – two of eight vocational education experiences offered to students of the Connecticut Junior Republic's Cable Academic and Vocational Education Center (CAVEC) on CJR's Litchfield Campus. Other classes include Building Design and Drafting, Creative and Fine Arts, Culinary Arts, Graphic Arts, Power Mechanics and Wood Technology.

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