



Ashton Glen Farm

Organic Grass Fed Beef

Natural Yorkshire Pork

www.ashtonglenfarm.ca



[Spring 2015 Newsletter](#)

Spring is in the air, I love that smell that emanates from the earth when the snowcover leaves and the frost starts to come out of the ground. It's the sensory cue that the growing season is near. It was a long cold winter, but despite that snow didn't really show up until into January. Without that snow blanket the frost went very deep this year, probably 4 feet compared to last year when the snow came in November and the frost went down maybe 18 inches. The good news is that the earwig population should be down this year. The bad news is that my main water pipe to the cattle froze in February so we were manually watering. They are drinking well over 250 gallons a day, which translated into a lot of time on our part.



[2014 in Review](#)

2012 was a drought year, one I hope will not be repeated any time soon. 2013 was one of the best and I would put 2014 as in the middle. Spring was slow to start so we missed about 4 weeks of grass which is quite a bit when you consider that the best seasons are about 20 weeks. Rainfall was good so the volume of grasses was great, but we lacked mid summer heat so sugar levels were lower. The end result was that finishing weights were about 18% lower than average. Being Grass Fed, we are much more susceptible to weather, since we don't just shovel corn into our cattle, but being anything else is unthinkable.



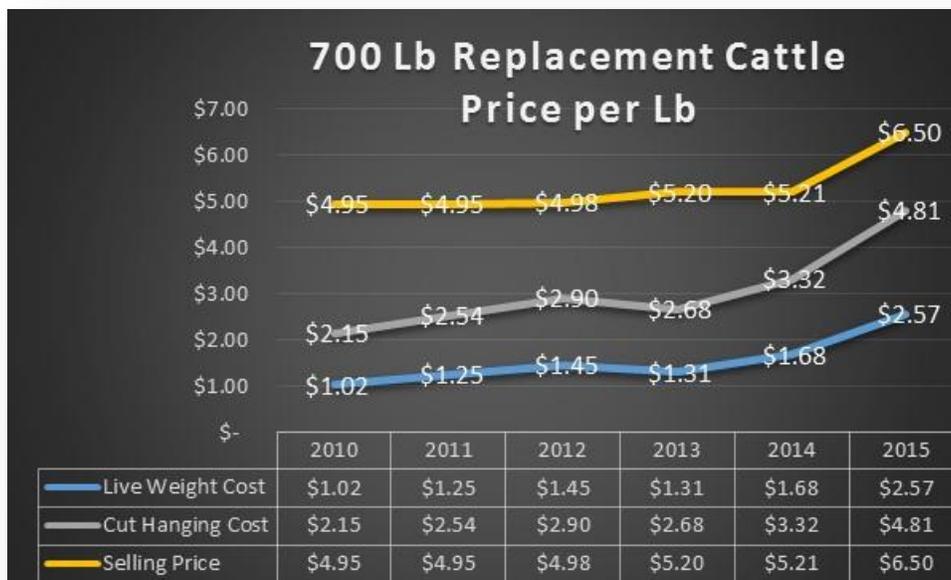
2014 also marked the end of my term as the President of the Ecological Farmers Association of

Ontario. The constitution mandates a maximum of 6 years on the board which I had reached. EFAO ended the year with over 500 farms as members and a fantastic conference in Orillia where 250 farmers spent 3 days learning from some of the best organic farmers

and teachers the world has to offer. Even better the vast majority of the attendees were young people, probably half my age. Since then I worked on a presentation to high school students on the topic of Sustainable Agriculture and tried it out on a group of students at West Carleton H.S. It was a lot of fun and they seemed eager to learn, so I hope to do some more of that this year.

2015 Beef Pricing

Diane and I spent many evenings this winter debating what we should do about pricing. You may have noticed that beef and pork prices have literally been skyrocketing at the grocery stores over the last 2 years. Since the BSE crisis in 2003 beef prices had been historically low. With low prices farmers began both scaling back or eliminating their beef herds so that between 2004 and 2014 the total annual beef production in Canada dropped from 3.6m to 2.6m head. At the same time cash crop prices began a meteoric rise so pasture and hay were converted to gmo corn and soybeans. In the last few years global demand for beef began to increase with China, Russia and other Asian countries leading the way. The result is seen below where the cost of live cattle in Ontario has risen 152% over the last 5 years to



\$2.57 a lb this spring. This translates to a cost of \$4.81 per lb butchered hanging weight. We had maintained a relatively flat selling price since 2010 but this year we had no choice but to raise the price to \$6.50 per lb for our beef or a 30% increase. What that means to you in \$ terms is that the average cost of a 120 lb half side will rise from \$625 to \$780. Looking backward, if we had raised prices 5.6% a year we would have ended up at the same spot. It was either that or stop selling beef, which we could not bring ourselves to do since a) so many people rely on us to produce quality food and b) it would leave a huge whole in our lives losing the interaction we have with you, our customers, who share our believes in how to farm and eat sustainably.

2015 Pork Pricing

While the main factor in beef pricing is replacement cattle costs, with pork it is the feed costs. Organic pig feed which we buy from Bernerland Organic Farm in Portland has increased 18% since 2012 which was the last time we changed our pork price. This year we are charging \$5.86 per lb up from \$5.33 or a 10% increase. To you in \$ terms that is an extra \$42 for the average pork side.

(You may be asking yourself how we survive when our costs in both beef and pork are rising faster than our prices. The short answer is over the same period we have expanded our production so even though our gross margin is shrinking we have a bigger base to cover the overhead costs of running the farm)



If you have a few minutes you can check out a news clip on meat prices that we were part of last fall. It can be found here: <http://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=447699>

We hope that the pricing info isn't overkill in terms of detail, but I wanted to be as transparent and informative as we possibly could so you have a clear view of what is happening at our end and how that effects you.

2015 Ordering

We posted our 2015 prices a couple of weeks ago and our email account has been buzzing. All the details are on our website as in previous years. The list of new people interested in ordering is getting quite long. We have told all potential new customers that existing customers have first crack at reordering and have until April 25th to do so. We do hope that we see you again this year and wish you a great spring and summer.

...Dave and Diane Smith

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