

# Bone Dry Ridge

A little bit of everything farm



## Spring News

May 7 2007

Spring had sprung, lambs are hopping, it is time to do some shopping.

The 2007 lambing and calving season has ended here at Bone Dry Ridge. We are getting more sleep now and therefore more enjoyable company if you plan to come down for a visit. The season started with Skye (one of our highland cows) giving birth to a healthy happy bull calf on March 26<sup>th</sup>. This is Skye's first calf and she sure liked him a lot and she cleaned him and cleaned him and cleaned him. But she would not let him near her utters. He was the cleanest hungriest calf around.



Calves as well as lambs need to get their mothers milk within the first hour or so of their birth so they get all the necessary antibodies to survive in the world.

Skye's little guy was not getting any so I had to intervene. I always have some colostrum (mothers first milk after giving birth) in the freezer in case of emergency and this was an emergency. He was very happy getting something to eat and got up and moving. All day he tried to get milk from his mom but she would do nothing but clean him. I gave him a bottle a few times, hoping he would have the strength to force himself on his mom.

That first night, Markthor and I got up at 4 am to get Skye and her new son into shelter. It was raining so we were concerned for him. In the barn they were out of the rain and maybe he would have a better chance getting some milk from his mom as she was confined. On his third day of life I gave him his last bottle. He then had such energy that he forced his mom to let him suckle. He ignored her kicks and kept trying. As soon as he managed to grab the nipple Skye got the idea. Ohhh... so this is how to alleviate all this pressure in my utters. Skye and her son, that we named Malcolm have been inseparable ever since. Raggi (Skye's mom) gave birth two weeks later to another bull calf who got the very appropriate name of X.

The lambing season started on March 30<sup>th</sup>. Since I started keeping sheep in 2001 the first ewe (not always the same one) gives birth on March 30<sup>th</sup>. This time it was Heba. She gave birth to her first lamb. Did well and is a very good mom. Lára (Heba's mom) gave birth to twins on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and shortly after that the season was in full swing. But something was wrong. Many of the ewes had single lambs when twins are the norm. And their lambs were all unusually large. Some so large in fact they got stuck in the birth canal and we had to pull them out with sometimes much difficulty. Some of them did not survive this ordeal. They simply were too big to be born. I have tried to figure out why



this happened but have not come up with a very good answer yet. All the previous years we have had a normal lambing season. This one definitely was not. My uncle in Iceland who has been raising sheep for 60 years is also at a loss for an explanation. The lambing season did end on a good note however. Lilja gave birth to two lovely looking rams on Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. We have quite the color combination of

lambs this year. There are white ones, black ones, moorit ones as well as one spotted one running around out there. It is such a joy to watch lambs play. One can totally forget all one's worries and just watch the pure joy of running and hopping in the grass.

As a result of this strange lambing season, many ewes giving birth to singles and some lambs not making it, I have fewer lambs then anticipated to sell. But don't panic. I have come up with a solution. I contacted a friend in Eastern Washington that also raises Icelandic sheep. She has about a 30 ewes and had a normal lambing season and therefore has lambs to spare. I got my original ewes from her and know she takes very good care of her animals. She raises them the conventional way. She uses land in between the big irrigation circles (the once we see from the airplane) to graze her sheep. Her partner grows wheat under irrigation and the sheep get to use the funny shaped land in-between the circles.

The price of grass hay has gone up a lot in the last two years. Two years ago I purchased a large round bale for \$ 16.00. It now costs \$ 40.00. The price of fuel has a lot to do with it. Slaughter fees have also gone up. And it all depends on the weather as well. You may not be aware that last summer's hot days in the beginning of August (we had a 100+ for five days) made the grass go dormant and it did not start growing again until all the animals were off the fields and in the barn for winter. This created a major hay shortage since all dry land farmers had to start feeding 2- 3 months earlier. I started feeding at the end of August when in a normal year I would start in October. As a result I have to raise the price from previous years.

The attached page is the order form. I have to do this with a little more formality then in the past since there are so many of you now looking for Icelandic lamb. I have had 100% repeat customers so I am in the process of enlarging my herd but my land can only support so many. Hopefully my Eastern Washington friend can keep filling in the gaps. I plan to slaughter in late September or early October. I will send a postcard with the slaughter day and when you need to pick up your lamb order at the butcher shop.

If you plan to come for a visit just call ahead to make sure we are at home. We usually have eggs available for purchase at \$ 3.00 a dozen. And as summer comes we will also have honey. \$ 3.50 for a half a pint and \$ 7.00 for a pint. Knitted socks and skin slippers might also be available (depends on how much time I can spend on it). Bring a picnic. This is a lovely place to hang out for a while.

Your farmer: Selma Bjarnadóttir