

A Publication for The Belted Galloway Society, Inc.

The **Belted Galloway** **2016** *Journal*



INSIDE FEATURES:

- Jane Faul Service Award**
- The Abbey of Regina Laudis**
- Ray Family Farms**
- Chatfield Memorial Scholarship**
- Point Show Awards**

Committed to Promoting and Preserving the Purity of the Belted Galloway Breed

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Belted Galloway cattle at the Abbey of Regina Laudis



As visitors approach the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, Connecticut they can sometimes catch a glimpse of black cows with a white belt grazing in the green pastures.

“I guess it is fitting that we have mainly black cows with a white belt; we do wear black and white habits,” laughed Sister Augusta Collins, the manager of the beef herd.

The Abbey of Regina Laudis has two belted breeds on the farm, Belted Galloway and Dutch Belted, but Sister Augusta points out the white belt is the only thing they have in common.

A Breed of Stewardship

The docile black cows with the unique white belt were not the first beef breed to graze the fields of the Abbey. When Mother Stephen introduced cattle to the agriculture operation in the 1960s she began with Shorthorn cattle and through the years interbred with Angus, Charolais and Simmental.

“I became in charge of the hay, pastures, and beef herd when Mother Stephen became ill. At that time we had a mixed breed of cattle,” said Sister Augusta. “We conferred and decided to get back to a single breed.”

Sister Augusta talked about researching breeds that would be suited for the weather and lands. The sisters first had considered Galloway, but when offered a donation of a Belted Galloway bull and a heifer they happily accepted.

“Mother Dolores’ uncle and aunt raised Belted Galloway

in Michigan, and they offered to give us a bull and a heifer,” explained Sister Augusta. “That is when we started our Belted Galloway herd.”

Sister Augusta laughed as she told the story of when she and Mother Telchilde drove from the Abbey to Gobles, Michigan to pick up the new bull and heifer from Vance and Gladys Kincaid. The journey in 2000 was not only the beginning of the Belted Galloway herd at the abbey, but the beginning of a new method of raising beef on the farm.

Adding the Belted Galloway breed to their cattle herd has allowed the sisters to transition their farming operation to one with a greater focus on conservation and stewardship practices in the field. Originally we raised corn for silage along with hay, but they found Belted Galloway were such good grazers there wasn’t a need to raise silage.

“When you plow the land it is a lot of work and you are also diminishing the organic matter in the soil,” stated Sister Augusta. “Belted Galloways are a very healthy good grazing breed. If you cultivate healthy pastures, you can just point them in the right direction and they are very self-reliant.

Today their herd is grass-fed and supplemented with hay in the winter months. By focusing on grazing lands and raising hay the sisters are able to maintain and improve the land while not taking on the additional work required with the production of silage. The sisters have been able to improve grazing with

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assistance from the NRCS, by receiving funding for fencing and other projects on the farm.

“We have over 100 acres in pasture today that we rotationally graze and cut for hay,” said Sister Augusta. “We have also started grazing after the second cutting on some of our hay fields, which helps improve the land.”

She explained that the abbey has taken advantage of several Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) programs that have been offered over the years to help farmers implement conservation practices on the farm.

“We have always had a focus on conservation and in the 1990s we received a River Restoration grant that allowed us

to protect an area of wetlands on the farm with high tensile fencing. We were also able to use grant funds at that time to create two cattle crossings so the cattle would not go through the wetlands and streams to get to the pastures.”

Recently they received an EQIP grant to build a new bull barn in a heavy use area. The funds allowed them to take down an old barn, build the new small structure, and put in place a conservation plan to reduce runoff during the rainy and winter months for the heavy use area.

“It is a small beautiful structure that has helped to improve our operation and the land, since we have to keep animals in the barn at times during the winter,” said Sister Augusta. “We have a wetland downhill from the heavy use area, and the new barn has been a huge help in conservation efforts.”

The abbey is very excited to see all the changes implemented on the farm thanks to these conservation programs. They hope to implement the final phase of the rotational grazing plan this fall with the addition of field watering systems, as they continue to strive to develop the optimal rotational grazing plan for their operation.

“The rotational grazing will allow us to manage the pastures and hay fields for our herd of 14 breeding animals, the new Belted Galloway bull we purchased last year, steers being raised for beef, and the 10 new gorgeous calves,” said Sister Augusta. “We will continue to breed animals for use at the Abbey and to sell, but we have no plans of expanding our



operation. We plan to remain a sustainable grass-fed operation and are comfortable with our current numbers. Expanding too much would mean moving into a direction where the animals would be more confined due to increasing numbers.

A Faith of Stewardship

The Belted Galloway herd is just one part of the rich agricultural tradition the small monastic community has embraced in their stewardship efforts since Mother Benedict founded the abbey in 1946.

Mother Benedict, born Vera Duss, was a United States citizen by birth but lived most of her early life in France with her mother. She became a surgeon after receiving her Doctorate in Medicine from the Sorbonne. She left that behind in 1936 when she heard the Lord's calling and entered the Benedictine Abbey of Notre Dame de Jouarre. During World War II, Jouarre and the Abbey were occupied by the Germans. As an American, Mother Benedict spent the war in hiding. As she watched the American soldiers liberate the village and abbey, she decided it was her calling to give something back to her home country.

"Mother Benedict decided she would give back by establishing a monastic foundation in the United States," explained Sister Augusta. "She had originally planned to establish a monastery in Virginia, but she was shown hospitality by an artist in this community. When a piece of land was offered by a local businessman, she decided to establish the monastery in Bethlehem."

Mother Benedict along with Mother Mary Aline started the Abbey of Regina Laudis on just a small piece of land, and through the years the Abbey has grown to the more than 400 acres that the sisters' care for today. Taking care of God's creation and working the land has always been a focus of the small monastic community of cloistered nuns.

"Saint Benedict set a standard that has made Benedictines environmentally conscious from the beginning of their history," explained Sister Augusta. "If we look back on the first monasteries, the monks were tied to the land for survival, so they tended the land as they tended their faith. Mother Benedict



continued this tradition when she planted the first vegetable garden at the abbey."

Sister Augusta explained that in the 1950s when Mother Stephen joined the community she took her knowledge from growing up on a farm in Minnesota and expanded the vegetable gardens, orchards, and introduced pigs and sheep into the operation. In the 1960s the abbey received a gift of two Shorthorn beef cattle. Thus the relationship between the land and the cows was born.

"We had just acquired a piece of land in the center of the farm, a beautiful farmhouse and pasture, when we got the cattle," said Sister Augusta. "It was then that we started to raise the animals to provide food for the community and as a source of income for the abbey."

In the 1970s, as the abbey grew, the farm slowly continued to expand with the introduction of new machinery that allowed the sisters to begin raising silage and hay for the livestock. As Mother Stephen and others, such as Mother Ruth who cared for the sheep grew older, Lady Abbess (Mother Benedict) recognized the importance of educating the next generation to continue the agriculture operation. So in the 1990s Sister Augusta, along with two other nuns, were sent to the University of Connecticut to pursue advanced degrees in agricultural studies.

"None of us were born on farms, and we didn't have that land based background. We just learned by working with Mother Stephen and others in the community," explained Sister Augusta. "I got my masters and PhD in agronomy; Mother Telchilde Hinckley got a masters and PhD in animal science; and, Mother Noella Marcellino in cheese microbiology. Working at the abbey dairy, Mother Noella had developed a surface ripened cheese that was based on the technique taught her by a French cheese master, and she has laid the groundwork for many new cheese makers to arise in the community."

All the products produced on the farm are served at meals or sold to the public at the Monastic Art Shop on the grounds of the abbey. The array of products produced at the abbey includes cheeses, jams and jellies, herbal teas, flavored vinegars, herbs, crafts, greeting cards and beauty products. The art shop also sometimes has a variety of leather products made from the

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hides of the Belted Galloway cattle raised on the farm.

“When we get the hide back from the butcher, rather than see it be burned or composted,” said Sister Augusta, “we begin scraping it in preparation for tanning. We are not able to work every hide, but we do as often as we can. We value each part of the animal, especially the beautiful hides that will survive long after the animal is gone.”

When time and assistance allows the sisters use the hides to make a variety of wonderful products including purses, belts, book covers, and pen carriers. Sadly for customers, the beef products you will not find in the Monastic Art Shop are the fresh individual cuts of beef.

“We do not have the facilities to process individual cuts of meat to sell retail, so we contract with individuals that buy beef halves. We have sold beef that way for over 10 years and have a steady customer base,” explained Sister Augusta. “We do serve our grass-fed beef at meals and to guests that visit the abbey.”

A Life of Stewardship

The Abbey of Regina Laudis hosts a number of guests each year for short visits, which allows its visitors to pray and work with the monastic community and possibly partake in our agricultural practices first hand if they desire. For those individuals wanting to immerse themselves in the life at the Abbey, there is the intensive yearlong internship program that has become an integral part of sustainability and outreach of the abbey operations.

“Young men and women who are looking for a spiritually based experience in crafts, land work, and studies can apply for the internship program,” explained Sister Augusta. “They do not receive pay for their work, but live in houses on the land, share in meals with other guests, and at the end of the program, receive a diploma in the area of concentration they choose.”

The majority of interns at the Abbey are young people in their 20s who are getting ready to enter college, taking a year off before graduate school, or taking some time off between jobs. All interns work in various areas at the abbey.

“I have the opportunity to teach the interns about the cattle, the equipment we use taking care of the fields, especially for the hay operation by raking and tedding, and I teach them the importance of conservation and caring for the land,” said Sister Augusta. “These are a few of many areas available, such as work at the dairy with Mother Telchilde, and at the sheep with Mother Jadwiga. We see this as a great opportunity to pass on to young people a skill and a love for the land and animals, as Lady Abbess and other Mothers in



the community shared with us.”

Sister Augusta sees the internship program as a mutually beneficial experience. It provides the small monastic community with assistance on the farm and in operations at the abbey. The sisters also share with the interns their experience of a life of stewardship and Christian faith. Interns can go to prayer services and Mass at the Abbey, plus they commune together at meals and at work on the farm.

“It is important for the interns to make that one year commitment, to see and work all the seasons on the farm,” said Sister Augusta. “That year provides the interns an opportunity to learn new skills and an environment to encourage personal growth.”

The cloistered Benedictine nuns at the Abbey of Regina Laudis, while small in number, have created a thriving sustainable farming operation with their strong foundation in stewardship and faith in God. Like the unique and self-reliant Belted Galloway herd that grazes on the pastures of the abbey land, the sisters at the abbey have been pointed in the right direction and have proven they can survive and thrive on the land.

