Interview at Polyface farm, Virginia, USA

What animals do you keep on the farm?
We have cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys, and rabbits. We also have a guard dog and 2 guard geese.

How do you feed the cows?
Most of the year, cows eat grass from pastures on our farm. We move the cows every day. In the winter they are kept in barns and eat hay.

Why do you move your cows every day?
We want our cows to eat grass that has got lots of flavour and nutrients. When the grass has been ‘pruned back’ by the cows, we move them on into new pastures to let the grass grow again.
How do you feed the pigs?
The pigs are kept in paddocks in the woods, as they like to eat plants, bugs and roots. They also eat grain that we buy from a local mill. We rotate their paddocks every week.

What is a "pigaerator"?
Cows are generally kept in barns eating hay for 120 days during winter. The average at Polyface Farm? 40 days. This is because we put goodness back into the soil, allowing our cows to graze on pastures most of the year. And the pigs help us with this. When the cows go into the barn between Christmas and mid-February, they are each dropping more than 20 kg of manure a day. To make sure the manure doesn't become too smelly, every few days we spread woodchips onto the manure, along with a layer of corn. The woodchips react with the manure and heat is
released, keeping our cows warm in the winter - it's as though they’ve got a heating blanket underneath them.

Once it's time for the cows to go out to pasture, we bring in a group of pigs to do what they do best - "pigaerate" - or using that great plough of a nose to "aerate" the 3-foot deep layer of manure, chips and corn. Remember the corn? Those pigs can smell the corn from miles away and will do anything to get it! So they churn up the mixture as they dig for it, resulting in evenly broken down compost that we can then spread back onto the fields.

**What does your poultry eat?**
The chickens and turkeys eat grass and also have grain. We move the chickens every day and the turkeys every other day. In the winter, we bring garden and kitchen scraps into the hoop houses for the chickens to eat.

**Why do you move the chickens every day?**
We move the chickens to keep them out of their manure and also to make sure the field gets an even spread of manure. Chickens are not very aggressive at foraging, so we have to make sure they have easy access to fresh grass each day - hence, the daily moves.

**What is the 'eggmobile' for?**
Our ‘eggmobile’ is ‘the sanitation crew’. This is where the hens lay their eggs. It has nest boxes inside, as well as ramps and doors so that the birds can eat as much grass as they want.
We move the ‘eggmobile’ into the paddock where the cows were a couple of days before. The chickens start scratching and pecking the cow pats. They don’t eat manure but just peck through it to find fly larva to eat. This means we have less flies on the farm, which makes for happy people and animals! By scratching and pecking, the chickens also ensure that the nitrogen from the manure (which is good for the soil) gets evenly spread. On top of all this, the hens lay eggs inside the ‘eggmobile’ and we collect them every afternoon. So the ‘eggmobile’ has many advantages: manure is spread evenly, flies are reduced, hens get fresh grass and bugs, and we get wonderful eggs!

**Do you use fertilizers?**

No we don’t need to. Compost is how we fertilize!
**What do earthworms do for the farm?**
Earthworms are very good for soil. They aerate the soil and allow air and water to reach down beneath the top layer. They break down plant material, like leaves, and add organic matter to the soil, which helps our pastures grow. We love them! They are one way we can see if the soil is fertile at a glance.

**Do you sell your food locally and abroad?**
We only sell our food locally. At Polyface we are trying to reach our local markets. We will only transport our goods within a half-day's drive (4 hours). We try to encourage communities to buy from their local farms.

**What sources of energy do we use?**
We are still using energy from the main grid, as we need large freezers to keep the meat cold! But when you think about it, our farm runs on solar energy, as our animals eat mainly grass and grass needs energy from the sun to grow.

**With our thanks to Brie Aronson and Polyface farm for this interview**