

Fence Fixing

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Editor's note: Maggie wrote this essay for her final assignment during the semester's Literature and the Land class. Maggie – from New Boston, New Hampshire – returned to the farm during the summer after her semester to work for two weeks in the summer of 2013.

The sun shone brightly and the clear blue sky had a transparency to it that I had not yet seen during our semester. It was the Wednesday after our solos. Before this, there had only been glimpses of this spectacular weather. There was usually a bright sun but cold air, or warmth in the air which instead came from a white blanket of clouds. There was never this gorgeous combination of a clear blue sky with gentle breezes and warm air.

I set out to the farm for work program, taking the shorter route by Pack-out along the gardens that still resembled fields, with a relatively small rectangle of broken soil that was undoubtedly going to be worked on today. This path had changed from the beginning of the semester when I remember plowing through knee deep snow and tripping over hidden rocks. The view of the barn as you approach it from this direction is always stunning. It is framed against the fields of North Pasture and the canopies of the trees behind it. The sun lit up the fields this time. They were just beginning to turn green; it was really the first day where I noticed the change from the old brown drooping grasses to the brighter shade of green. That green reminded me of spring and after the rains of the past week it was especially noticeable. Looking up from my feet as they guided me down the slightly muddy pathway, I could see the pastures stretching out past the windmill down to Hoyt's field on my left, and on my right the speckled hens pecking around the farmyard like little sailboats with their triangle tails up in the air ruffling in the breeze. This stunning view of the farm has always been my favorite.

As our farm crew separated and Megan and I set out to fix fences around the pasture for the afternoon, I felt a rising sense of excitement. Every corner I turned, the view was striking, whether it was the tiny daffodils that grew in the far corner of the field where we cranked the metal fences tight, or the gentle sloping of the fields as we walked along the fence line searching for places to tighten the wire. Things were changing on the farm. They always were, in the larger scale too. The fencing that ran around and through the fields reflected the hands of many different farmers who worked this land. The wooden posts in the fields varied; some square, some round, and still others that were trees from the forest cut and polished to be a perfect fence post. The wire fixings were different too, and we carried a tool box that had at least three tools for each of the possible fence types we could encounter. Despite the variety of styles, the fences still formed a connected whole which linked the

farm together. Even just over the past week, things were changing too. The scenery was becoming springier. The animals were about to go out on pasture. The gardens had mounting anticipation attached to them as they became ready for planting. I knew I had changed too though, throughout this semester, but it was apparent in smaller ways. I appreciated the outside to a new extent; it calmed me instead of seeming foreign. I found myself becoming excited over getting to spend an afternoon tracing the mistakes on fences with Megan and digging holes to replace fence posts.

Megan taught me how to use the wrench to slowly turn the wheel that coiled the fence wires tighter, and quickly stick the pin into it so we would not lose our progress. There was something satisfying that I really appreciated about cranking the wires to be taut until they perfected the pastures for the animals to be on. We worked our way around the fences and the sun shone through onto our work and made it seem cheerier, more efficient, more successful somehow. As Megan set me up to dig a hole around a post to replace it, I knew I was carving out both the memory of what would be one of my favorite work programs and also the growing excitement for the two weeks I will be working at the farm this summer.

In four weeks, when I return again to the farm, it will have changed but there will still be a sense of similarity. The grass will have lost its spring color and turned to a summer shade. It will be taller instead of the gentle young grass it is now, and the animals that are out on pasture will graze among it. The lambs and young chickens will have grown and lost their sense of youth that is associated with springtime. The sun and wind will be hot and scorching, and clouds may be a needed break for shade. But there will still be familiarities; the sunlit view of the barn walking up the pathway between the gardens, and the gentle and straightforward directions and help from Megan. Remembering the past and thinking to the future, I will still walk the fence lines over the sloping pastures.