

The Storm Fiasco-

By Sam Fisher

If you had any interaction with us during the past two weeks you've experienced it. Long intervals until we replied to email and phone calls. Less than optimal customer service when shopping at the farm store. Mistakes made on orders delivered to buying clubs. You likely wondered what's going on.



Well, there were things going on. We were in crisis mode. The storm on Wednesday June 3rd destroyed our chicken (broiler) shelters—and we've been scrambling to rebuild. As you may know, since 2012 we've raised meat chickens—or broilers—in portable field shelters that allows free access to all things natural; grass, bugs, fresh air, sunshine, and exercise, and most importantly, the shelters are portable and light enough to be pulled by hand to a fresh spot twice daily.

We've had different designs over the years, and had adopted a hoop style structure that worked well (see the picture above). Although we've dealt with wind issues along the way, we staked them down at each end and they were fine. Until last week, that is.

On Wednesday around 6 PM I, along with our 6 and 8 year old sons, were out moving and feeding chickens (the shelters were adjacent to our driveway and about a hundred feet from Rt. 10) when the storm came up. We took shelter in my brother's building supply showroom to wait it out. While there was considerable wind and heavy rain at the outset of the storm, it really wasn't anything uncommon. But toward the end of the storm a powerful wind (we heard reports saying it came from two directions) comes along for probably only 30 seconds, and whoosh, all seven shelters took flight and in an instant, the damage was done. Four out of seven landed in the King's (across Rt. 10) garden and woods, one wrapped around the telephone pole, one landed on top of our perimeter fence, and one landed inside our fence with minimal damage. I'll share several photos to the right and below.



One shelter nearly beyond recognition, suspended in the wires, another on the ground with minimal damage. Such is the way of the wind.



Across Rt. 10, strewn out on the King's property.



About 1200 chickens from 3 weeks to 7 weeks old. Alive and well, but homeless!

While this episode created a hiccup in our lives—even a short term crisis during the busy season of the year, we feel blessed. We had the wonderful opportunity to see the neighborhood in action. After the storm passed, several neighbors showed up to help clean up the wreckage. Other neighbors and friends came to help build new shelters on several occasions. Only a few chickens were lost during the three days they were just out in the open (we parked a few wagons and a trailer in the pasture for shade and elemental protection during the interim until we had new shelters).



Rebuilding. Lower profile and more open on the sides for increased resilience to wind.



We took the opportunity to redesign and improve the new shelters, making them more resilient and functional. There's an anonymous quote that says, "Sometimes things have to go wrong in order to go right." Maybe this has been one of those times.

In the photo to the left, there are four new shelters in use. Because this isn't enough space to house all 1200 birds, we left the doors open to allow additional area. This is great, but leaves the chickens in a vulnerable position in terms of predators. Unfortunately, foxes, raccoons, opossums, hawks, eagles, and even feral cats love chicken as much as you and I do, and are not finicky about how they obtain them. While we don't loath predators for their ways (and even encourage wildlife), we are a for-profit business, and raising chickens to feed predators is not a profitable venture.

Unfortunately, this incident has temporarily upended our soy/soy-free plan for early summer. Because the chickens housed in all seven shelters were thrown together into one flock with no way to differentiate between the flocks being fed soy and the ones fed soy-

free, we now won't have any soy-free available again until July 21st. We'll be glad to serve you with soy-free, but it will be delayed due to this fiasco.

To be honest, morale was low that evening, after the storm. Being rather disheartened, Esther and I even had the conversation of "this-is-why-the-industry-raises-chickens-indoors-in-massive-buildings" (even if the result is a product not fit for eating). But we believe in not only the health-giving properties of pastured meats, but are dedicated to providing humane, natural habitat for the animals in our care as well. Some would say we're just too stubborn to give up, but we've chosen the alternative path and are committed to staying with it. Plus, the combination of moral support from the surrounding community, a nights rest when things are in the doldrums, and time to reset our focus and make decisions made a huge difference. We feel like the experience has made provision for a better system than we had

previously. For that we are grateful, and continue, inspired by the encouraging words and support many of you offered, and the opportunity to turn an otherwise adverse situation into a something positive. Your caring turned the tide from frustration to optimism. And in optimism there is opportunity. Thank you all!



Quote Worth Re-quoting -

"The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." ~ Winston Churchill

"Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently." ~ Henry Ford