

While our hearts and thoughts are with the hundreds of thousands of Americans who are protesting against police brutality and for changes that will result in racial, social, political, and economic justice for everyone in our country, our bodies are here, still in “Covid 19 stay at home” mode for the foreseeable future. And that leaves us yet, in spite of all that is going on, with our daily work.

Those of us whose jobs involve caring for livestock and growing food must, of necessity—even without a pandemic—take care of our animals and farm work. So, the everyday tasks that go along with that cannot be neglected.

This evening, while Runo set up the portable electric netting we use to confine our sheep flock to a particular pasture, I took a half hour to do a little totally unscientific “research” to see just what this pasture has to offer.

We aim for great diversity in our fields and meadows. If, not feeling safe venturing out to do much shopping during this pandemic, you have lived without some of the “extras” that make meals a treat, you know that it isn’t so much lack of any particular food that is annoying. It is, instead, a desire for more variety.

We think it is the same with livestock. So, we hope to have pastures full of all kinds of plants. Most of them, we have discovered, whether classified as “good” plants or “weeds,” are palatable to sheep. They like to pick and choose, and it is fun to watch individuals and note the differences in their tastes—or, perhaps, their needs. I have watched ewes moving across a new piece of pasture selectively eating only dandelion flowers. Others have their heads down, searching out the small, tender low-growing plants.

I wish I were more adept at identifying all of the plants I see in the various meadows. And, on one casual pass through a field, I see only a small percentage of what is growing there. But, this evening, just as a sample, this is what I saw on the East Field Pasture: orchard grass; bluestem grass; Queen Anne’s lace; alsike clover; quack grass; dandelion; red clover; white clover; buttercup; alfalfa; bird’s foot trefoil; yellow rocket; brome grass; canary grass; oxeye daisy; field bindweed; plantain; sorrel; cinquefoil; blue-eyed grass; wild strawberries; goat’s beard; curly dock; cattail; black medic; and three or four kinds of “swamp grass” I am not competent enough to identify more properly.

So, tomorrow, when the sheep flock works its way into this new pasture, it will be fun to just sit and watch and notice what it is that they need and want as they encounter a fresh and delectable salad bar.

And, we will pause, for just a moment, and put aside our worries about the incompetence in Washington, the difficulties that lie ahead in promoting justice, and the virus that is still spreading throughout the country. We will just sit and watch sheep eat.