

LIFE on the farm

By Dieter Krieg, Editor

As I write this, I'm sitting on a padded chair in a heated office, but I'm not convinced that this is more comfortable than a hay bale in the dairy barn or a place near the old potbelly stove down at the machinery shop.

I like the secure, warm, and satisfying feeling that the barn and shops offer. The winds of March may be giving us one last blast of Winter, but indoors we can feel as snug as a bug in a rug.

I've often stood by a window of the barn, staring out at frozen mud, electrical wires dancing in the wind, naked trees bending to the will of the storm, and loose sheets of tin flapping on the roof. And I've felt the bone-chilling gusts try to bore their way through each and every crack around the windows. It's a cold, uninviting scene.

To realize then that I'm standing in a barn warmed by 40 Holsteins and scented by the pleasant odors of hay, straw, silage, the cows themselves, and even manure - is most satisfying. It's a nice place to be, especially when it's cold and windy outside.

We were always reminded of the warmth of the barn every time we carried milk to the adjoining milk house. We'd set one of the full buckets down, push a sliding door to the side, and be greeted by a blast of wind that chilled the cheeks and sent a cloud of lime to the opposite end of

the barn. We always tried to close that door as quickly as we could to keep the cold from intruding any more than absolutely necessary.

The family dog and a whole herd of barn cats liked the stable too. They all had favorite resting places on the straw or hay that was stacked by the wall and ready for use that evening. Talk about warmth and comfort, those four-legged friends of ours were the ones who really had it made.

Not to be forgotten on a list of favorite places in the Winter time is the feed store or farm machinery dealership that still has a foot in an age that is rapidly disappearing.

Those old places never did impress me as a place of business, but they sure had an atmosphere that was uniquely their own. They were more than a place of business. They were a gathering place - where tales were told and tobacco was spit. What's more, they were a nice warm place to kill a little time if you were so inclined.

Big picture windows, shelves filled super-market style with lots of goods, and nearly spotless floors just don't have the same flavor as the old stores that were warmed by potbelly stoves and unshaven farmers in overalls comparing Spring plans. The farmers, soiled wooden floors and wood-fired stoves have a character all their own. In some places the

service wasn't always the best, but the place was warm nonetheless in more ways than one.

The trends of modern farming and agribusiness are causing some of the old "personalities" of the business to go by the wayside, I'm sorry to say.

More and more, the warm stanchion barn is being replaced with cold free-stall units. The thick stone walls and heavy timbers are gone on many farms. They had character and warmth. Two-by-fours and sheets of tin are cheaper, but they also lack the comfort and security feeling I used to know.

Farm stores are looking more and more like automobile dealerships

and drug stores. Sophisticated equipment, with high price tags is on display, and computer terminals have taken the place of parts books that were a yard or more wide. Gone is the overturned barrel by the stove where old-timers had for years battled for dominance in the world of checkers, political opinion, and tractor colors.

It goes without argument that these new, modern places of business are probably more efficient and impressive. But like many of those new barns, they haven't yet acquired that unique character that offers a special sense of belonging because that's what we have known all our lives.

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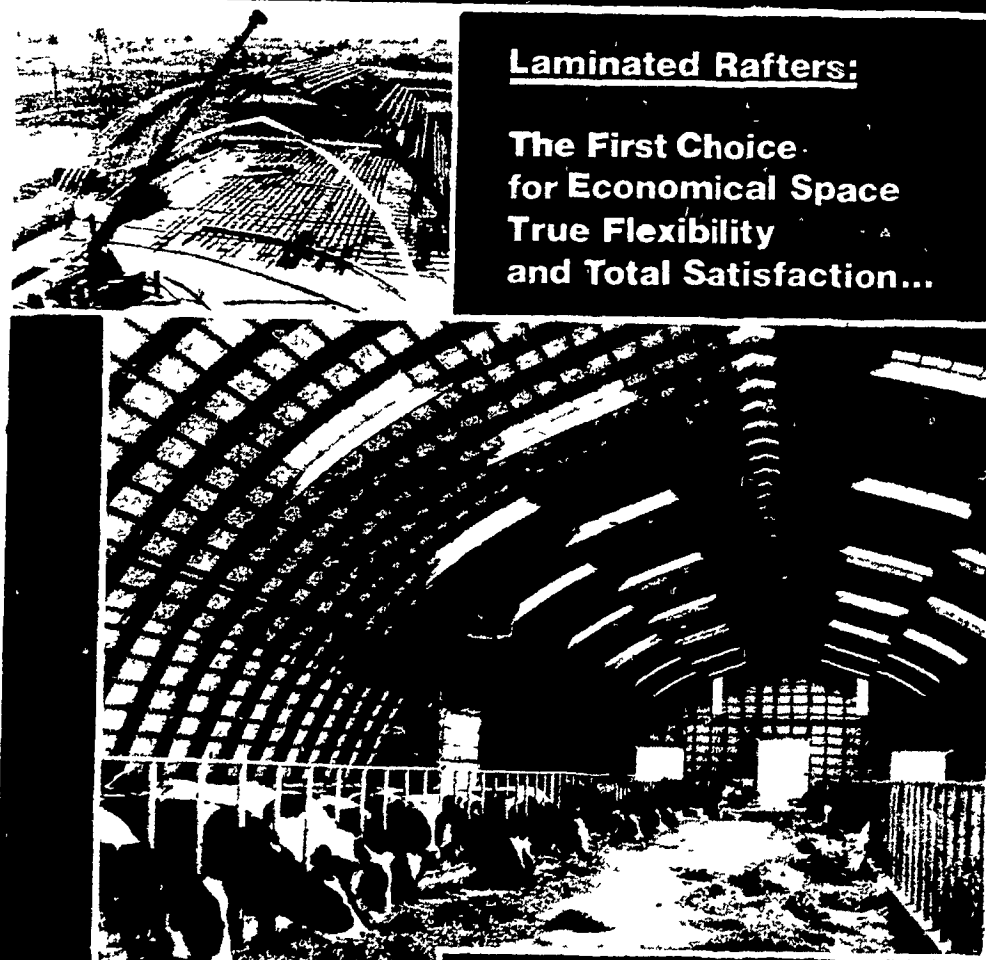


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