

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp

High interest rates. Low commodity prices. Production costs up. Income down. Whispers of foreclosures. Worst times on the farm since the Great Depression. A heavy cloud of insecurity

continues to loom over the farming community, as it does over the general economy, bringing the mental and emotional stress levels of farm families to sometimes threatening levels.

What keeps farm families going through tough years is an unswerving faith in God, an incredible determination to hang on 'till better times and that flashing ray of sunshine that periodically pushes away the economic clouds of gloom and doom.

Sometimes the sun shines at midnight.

Sue was a first-calf heifer, a powerful front-end daughter of Elevation, one of the Holstein breed's top sires. Last year this time, she'd dropped a dead calf, five weeks ahead of schedule. Her lack of udder development at the early calving told us she wasn't going to do a thing for us at the milk pail.

But nearly a week after that unfortunate premature birth, Sue began bagging, up into milk flow. Miraculously, she not only developed a respectable, well-attached udder, but eventually finished her several months

milking well above normal heifer production.

Confirmation that she was bred back, though, brought with it a warning: the strapping big heifer's birth canal was too small to possibly ever permit normal birth, and the premature dead calf had probably been Mother Nature's way of solving the problem. Her chances of carrying a calf full-term were questionable, and even if she did, a Cesarean delivery was a good probability. With birth surgery comes increased problems for any cow.

We began holding our collective breaths several weeks ago as Sue passed the five-week-till-due period. Four weeks, three weeks, two weeks. Still nothing. And, by golly, examinations hinted that Sue's reproductive structure was "loosening up."

With less than a week to go, Sue's time came. It was just after midnight as we scattered fresh bedding for the delivery last weekend.

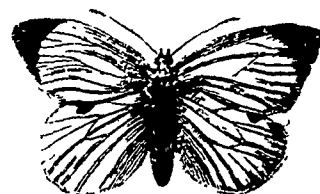
A half hour later, a tired Sue collapsed to the floor of the pen and rolled on her side. We continued pressure to pull out the calf, hoping that if we could just get that head cleared of the birth canal, the hip structure of the calf would not lock on that of the cow, and the gamble with nature would be won.

Slowly, a shining, wet, black with a white-V' marked face of the calf came into view. One final exhilarated tug delivered a large, very alive heifer calf into the world.

But one fear yet remained, that the delivery might have left Sue with damaged nerves, as occasionally happens, causing partial paralysis to the cow. With a few minutes rest, and a bit of coaxing, Sue slowly rose to her feet, to lick clean her newborn, accompanied by the beautiful sound of motherly grunts of pride and concern. In response, the infant heifer tried to raise a wobbly, still wet head.

Outside, the night was chilly, dark, silent, but inside that pen, a feeling of sunshine glowed brightly on that miracle of birth.

And we were again reminded, through good times and bad, why we so proudly answer to the name "farmer."



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