

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



Even if there were no colored leaves, even if the corn fields hadn't paled in the frost and faded to dusty brown, even if the nights weren't crystal clear with a refreshing nipiness, we'd still know it.

Fall simply couldn't pass without our knowing, even if the most physically obvious signs weren't quite so pointed. For, the "critters" know it.

Yes, the migrating season once again is upon us.

No robins have hopped around worm-searching the back yard for weeks, and the mockingbird that haunted the garden has sought other territories. Even the usual noisy, everyday chattering of the birdlife that frequents the meadow

was ominously still and silent during a gray, overcast afternoon walk.

Then the rains fell, softly at first, gaining relentless, wind-blown momentum. Through the storm sounds came a mystical, mournful calling, from somewhere up on the hill striped with corn and hayfields.

Geese, probably forced down by the weather, interrupted on their journey toward the greening grain fields of Eastern Shore, were calling to one another in the darkness. Their migration never fails to stir a mixed emotion of joy in simply seeing their symbolic V-shaped flock flight pattern, and a sadness of the departure of more

pleasurable weather with them. Still another migration, though, sends other "critters" stirring toward distant parts unknown. A most unwelcome migration, I might add.

It begins with a jangling telephone, the voice at the other end that of the owner of a pasture some distance. For the past few summers, this pasture has hospitably housed and amply fed a number of bred heifers and select dry cows.

Lush grass, clusters of shading trees, freshets of water bubbling up from beneath swampy humps of wiry grass, all fulfill the needs of this group, which grows fat and lazy from May through September.

But, come late October, the frosts wither the grasses and pasture evolves to a condition which the teenagers might label "boring." Within these bovines wells a dormant longing for new scenery, untrodden carpets of grass, and the classic greener forage beyond the fence.

This, however, is just not any old

greener grass. It belongs to a local golf course, whose groundskeepers hold decidedly different viewpoints about what greener grass is to be used for. Certainly not for yanking off by the mouthfuls, or for dancing through with dainty hooved feet.

Prompt policing halts the impending migration of the restless flock and two trailerloads of heifers find themselves once more back within the more confining corrals of home.

Would you believe, on the same day, I glance across the meadow to distant hills, where black and white bodies against a green background turn up at a particular suspicious corner.

Several minutes and many anxious glances later, the spots are surely moving, heads buried deep in lush alfalfa, on a course as purposefully straight as if it had been computer charted by NASA.

Memories of Ladino clover (the neighbors), sampled before we discovered that a lightning strike had totaled the fence charger, die reluctantly inside the hard heads of heifers. Rounded up by the pickup, the yearlings giggle and kick their heels in disdain one last time before fleeing back to the safety of the fence.

Migration? Beautiful, majestic, inspiring - when it's geese. But heifers? Forget it!



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