

On being a farm wife -And other hazards Joyce Bupp



Every vocation has its hazards. Typists break fingernails. Long-distance truckers complain of indigestion from bouncing around on ragged interstates and bumpy back roads. Computer operators suffer from trying to read endless strings of little fluorescent digital numbers dancing across a tiny display screen. Pro-tennis players have terminally sore elbows and we all know about football-player knee. They're even recently diagnosed a chicken-packer-hand problem, an affliction of sore and stiff hands apparently related to lengthy exposure day after day to cold, wet processing conditions. Dairy farmers are no different. Bad backs and aching knees are classic ailments of dairymen, due to the constant stopping and kneeling that goes with milking cows. Milking parlors, where cows are on raised platforms and milkers stand to work, have helped for some dairy workers

Our daughter and I suffer from another fairly common dairy farm complaint - what we might simply call "milkmaid hands". The disinfectants and detergents demanded by the strict sanitation standards of the dairy industry counter every hand lotion invented it seems. And the allergies we've developed to them leave us with dry, cracked skin, never totally free of rash and itching. Ivory hands girls" we just aren't. And I recently discovered

another health hazard of farming, one I had frequently heard of but never intimately experienced.

Call it livestock eye-tis. More commonly known as your everyday variety of black eye. The worst case of this affliction I've probably run across was suffered about a year ago by a good friend, when she was soundly kicked in the face by one of those more nervous young cows we all have in the milking string from time to time.

Connecting squarely with our friends' face, the cow's powerful hoot left in its wake a broken nose and two severely blackened eyes. Although it took quite some time to completely heal, there blessedly was no permanent damage. It was her I immediately thought of two weeks ago when a rambunctious heifer's head squarely connected with my lower forehead, as I leaned over to shake out straw while bedding a heifer pen.

Ice applied immediately greatly reduced the pullet-egg-sized knot which arose at once. But as it shrunk, it left behind in its wake the most lovely, grape-juice-shade of semi-permanent eye makeup imaginable.

The greatest injury was solely to my pride - and not to my eye (I didn't even lose my contact lens). Time-wise, the garden needed attention anyway, as I went into hiding from the public for a few days.

For the farmer, it meant suffering a string of accusations about

wife about. To his defense, he was nowhere even close when Holly the heifer and I collided, and remained unaware of the confrontation until

several hours later. Besides, he's not the type of

person who would abuse his wife. He'll just let me "help" instead.

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