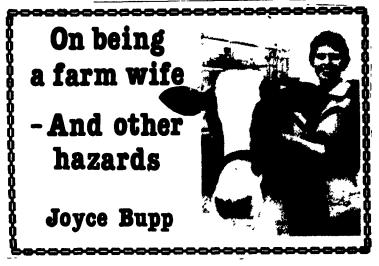


Lańcaster Farming, Saturday, January 25, 1986-B5



A squishing sound under my feet was the first clue to the problem.

Sure enough, the old ragged rug in front of the washing machine was as soggy as a swamp in early April. And outlining the perimeters of the machine's bottom metal edges was a telltale scalloped frame of water-soaked concrete.

A leak? This was probably more like a revolt.

Appliances in this farmhouse take hard use. Especially the washing machine. Laundry around here goes beyond the normal loads of damp towels and slightly soiled shirts and blouses.

We're talking DIRT here.

Like jeans with fermented silage literally ground into the fabric when the farmer crawls into the silo to make bottom unloader repairs. And pockets full of the aromatic feedstuff.

Wet manure plastered into the threads when a heifer signals her dislike of being singled out of the crowd and flattens the chaser into feedlot residue. Or mud splattered over more heavy denims from the "absolutely fabulous puddle" just discovered by the youngest and his 'wheels."

Piles of sweatshirts whitened with dust from running loads of high moisture corn into feed carts. Stacks of garments from which protrude filthy cuffs, dragged through pasture mud, and then solidified into permafrost on icy davs.

Last week, with its week-long cattle show, heaped new waves of abuse on this long-suffering electrical servant.

In addition to the usual disasters

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If you try to starve a snake, you might have a long wait. According to the National Wildlife Federation's "Ranger Rick" magazine, because of the size of their stomachs, some snakes can go as long as six months without eating.

of dirt were specialty items: cow blankets (old sheets) that had hibernated for a couple of months, forgotten, in the trunk of the old car, from the last fall cattle show. Ever hear of petrified dirt.

Add to that a couple more loads of soggy, washrack shirts. sweatshirts and jeans, in the first stages of mildew after liberal soaking, then extended storage behind the showbox in the warm dairy barn.

Sprinkle this challenge with wellbrowned (once white) socks unearthed from the edges of the cattle bedding pack, and at least one pair of underwear hoisted flaglike by a batch of youth exhibitors playing their usual Farm Show after-hours tricks.

Maybe it was the sleeping bags that were the final blow of abuse. When I went to hang out the second one washed that morning, the puddle gathering on the basement floor was filling deep enough to support minnow life.

Î called in the heavy repair artillery. Stretched out on the damp floor, his head partway under the machine, the farmer's evaluations of the problem went something like this: "Let's see... Hummm?... Uh, Huh." Dollar signs mentally floated past my eyes, anticipating a call to a repair specialist.

Then the verdict: "It's just a metal clamp." Cost? About 50 cents.

Once in a while, we win one in the never-ending repair race.

And, boy, does it ever feel good. Unless you're one of those lonely washing machine repairmen.

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