



Farm Philosophy

By
Newton Bair

Under The Haystack, Fast Asleep

I often wonder just what happened to Little Boy Blue. Was he caught napping? Shouldn't he be blowing his horn? He probably got scolded for making too much noise anyway. Let the cows enjoy the corn. It's nice and cozy under the haystack.

While the message in Mother Goose is directed to little kids, it's not too subtle for older ones too. Depending on your age, the lesson varies. But, considering that the message is simply that one shouldn't sleep on the job, it applies to kids of any age. It also warns against delaying the unpleasant decisions that mold our lives. Or, burying our head like an ostrich, hoping trouble will go away. Or crying "Wolf" when none threatens. We crawl under the haystack when we should be tending the sheep.

I am often haunted by the childhood memories of those summertime chores we called "minding the cows." Fences were often non-existent, or at best very old and broken down. The next best means of confining cows to the pasture area was to have the younger children stand guard along the openings that tempted the cows into the orchard or the sweet corn patch. There were always more holes in the fence than there were kids to watch

them. It created more tension than a supertuned guitar string. We couldn't have slept, even if there had been a haystack handy to crawl under. The cows would have eaten it right off our backs anyway.

It's an awesome responsibility for a child to assume. Twenty beefy behemoths easily overpower the imagination of a 60-pound youngster. Our best tactic was to run screaming from one hole in the fence to another, hoping to frighten the bossy critter away. The noise

only heightened their curiosity and brought them closer to the threat of invading the forbidden land.

Some of this same kind of hysteria gets carried over into later life. Responsibilities always look bigger than they really are. The ones imposed by society or by our job, are seldom as great as the ones we impose upon ourselves. We tend to overestimate the expectations of our peers, so too much time is spent in worry and tension. We stamp our feet, chew our nails and cuss under our breath. All that activity does is make us *feel* like we're making something happen. It doesn't really turn back the invaders, or make the grass greener, or patch the fence.

We also like to tag politicians with the Little Boy Blue image. They're either making a loud noise, posing for media pictures, or hiding quietly while the Mafia befouls our commerce, or the Commies threaten to invade our sacred shores. He'd never get reelected if he was caught snoozing.

But the image of Little Boy Blue is nowhere as apparent as in modern news reporting. News writers and TV commentators flagellate themselves with it. They are nearly hysterical in their search for and embellishment of a news spectacular. Most notable

are the recent overkill of the Iran history story, and the "Pearlygate" TV preacher scandal. While the reporters run screaming and waving their little flags in front of the Pulitzer prize judges, the real enemies like drugs, AIDS, and illegal immigrants, just like the hungry cows, are inching closer to the holes in the fence. A little less noise might attract less attention. Hiding under the hay would be a relief for Reagan and the report-

ers, and especially the readers and listeners.

Well, let the politicians and reporters tootle away on their horn. Let 'em scream and wave their hands in front of the sagging fence. Leave them to worry about scoops, and leaks in the Iran and PTL gates. As for me, I'll just see if I can't find a nice, warm haystack and take a little snooze! If Little Boy Blue got away with it, why can't I?

Fertilizer Facts

Pennsylvania must have these numbers listed on the label.

MEDIA — Most gardeners know that fertilizer helps their plants grow, but deciding which kind to buy can be confusing. Some fertilizers are meant for specific plants, advises Susan Goldsworthy, Delaware County Extension horticulturist, while others are more general but contain different ratios of nutrients. Which kind should you buy? Either kind can work — depending on your need and what you're willing to pay.

Numbers such as 5-10-10 on a fertilizer package tell you the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, respectively. All fertilizers sold in

Knowing the meaning of the numbers and the type of plant to be fertilized makes the purchase decision easier. Plant leaves require mostly nitrogen, while phosphorus and potassium are primarily used in flower and seed production. So, if you want to fertilize a foliage plant, choose a fertilizer that's high in nitrogen. For flowering plants you'll want one low in nitrogen but high in phosphorus and potassium. Following these tips can make your fertilizer buying less confusing.

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