

**On being
a farm wife
- And other
hazards**

Joyce Bupp



As I knelt on the floor, my knees felt cool and hard, even through the heavy denim jeans I was wearing.

Thump....thump....thump. No, not that one.

Feeling a bit embarrassed at the position I was in, I kept my head low.

Thud....thud....thud. No, that one didn't seem right, either. Gosh, I sure hope no one I know

comes along and finds me here like this.

Thump....thump....thump. Well, there must be a better one here somewhere.

Given my usual luck and timing, at any moment a pair of legs from the many hurrying past my kneeling body would stop and I'd be forced to show my face.

Thunk....thunk....thunk. Ah, at last.

A watermelon that sounded just right.

Over the years, I've carted home dozens of watermelons. This big, green-striped fruit with it's crisp, reddish flesh is adored by all members of our family. Few snacks win their vote for hot summer afternoon fieldwork breaks more quickly than a slice of juicy watermelon.

But, the Farmer was always a better melon selector than was I. Sometimes I'd pick a good one; sometimes I'd cart home selections that were best described as mediocre. And, for awhile, I cheated. The purchase of half of a pre-sliced melon took out the guesswork.

Then I began practicing the Farmer's "knock-knock" technique.

And, that was why I was here, crawling along on the supermarket floor, half under the produce counter, rapping my knuckles on watermelons. Eventually, one answered back with the proper, hollow-sounding thunk. A ripe watermelon doesn't give a solid "thud" or "thump" sound. It makes a kind of "thuunnk," with a hint of empty space inside.

Knocking on watermelons is not the first activity that has earned me strange looks from fellow shoppers in supermarkets in the past many years.

Soon after we built the calf nursery years ago, we were on the lookout for shallow, round containers which would fit the feed and water holders. Small buckets would work, but for very young calves, I wanted something with less depth. Then I spotted in a supermarket the perfect sized, tough, plastic snack bowls.

The stack of some twenty brightly-colored bowls earned me some corner-of-the-eye, sidelong, glances from fellow shoppers. Friendly clerks I'd come to know through regular visits asked if I was throwing a party.

Confiding that the bowls were for a barnful of calves sent them into gleeful laughter. Vindication came from a sweet, elderly gentleman behind me in the checkout line who admitted he'd bought some of the same bowls for feeding his rabbits.

Eyebrows raise even higher, and the looks carry greater disbelief, on those occasions when I stock up on dairy herd first aid supplies.

Periodically, we have need for quantities for hydrogen peroxide, that neat treatment that bubbles the bacteria away on wounds and infections. When I can find it on sale, two - sometimes three - bottles for a buck, I lay in a supply of a dozen or so bottles. (Just treating the various cuts and bruises of the family itself goes through a couple bottles a year.)

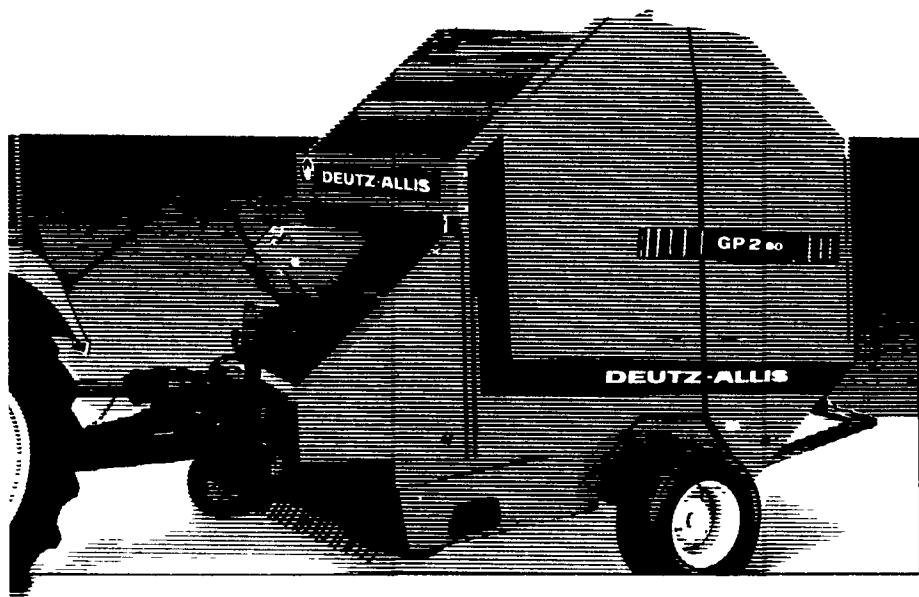
Lining up a large purchase of peroxide bottles on a checkout counter generates considerable interest. One clerk eyed the parade of peroxide containers marching toward her on the automated belt, glanced at me with a perplexed look and asked if I was making up a first aid kit. Another once suggested that I must be a nurse. Well, sort of.

Others just give me a suspicious look that says they'd really like to ask but will politely just speculate with their expressions and imaginations.

Crawling on a supermarket floor, rapping watermelons, may not be genteel.

But it's more believable to fellow shoppers than quantity purchases of first aid supplies for cows.

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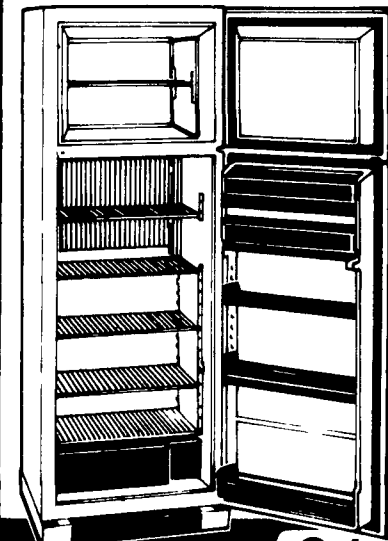
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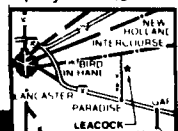
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