

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



"You gotta' minute?" inquires the Farmer in innocent tones, poking his seed-corn hatted head through the front door.

"Actually I've been summoned to pick up my first installment of a million dollar lottery win and don't have a moment to spare."

Or....."I just got off the phone with the President and he needs me to leave this very minute for the White House."

Maybe....."The Nobel Peace Prize committee is on its way down the road with my award."

Noting that none of the above would prove even faintly believable answers - he'd laugh me out of the house - I sigh and acknowledge

the initial question. Yes, in all reality, I probably have "gotta' minute." And no good excuse not to lend it to this need - whatever it is.

Seems a bunch of dry cows - maybe a dozen or so - had grown bored with their vacation-from-milking pasture. When the elements of tall, fall weeds, and dampness after a good shower, teamed up to short out the strand of electric fencing, these heavy-with-calf bovines seized the chance for a change of scene.

They'd spent the previous afternoon back visiting old herdmates at the dairy barn, a quarter-mile distant on our country road from

the dry cow lot. And, while the visitors could be herded into the trailer and hauled back, that would take two trips.

Probably simpler to just herd the whole bunch back down the road. Uhhh, right.

All I had to do was guard a potential break-out space between the garage and the split rail yard fence. Once started in a pack down the road, the touring band would collectively hightail it down the paved route and we'd neatly herd them into the pasture.

On hand were a half-dozen of us, all experienced to some degree in corralling cows. A pair of three-wheelers would serve as the quarter-horses in this cattle drive. Only thing lacking on this drive was a chuck wagon for meals: but it was only going to take a minute. Right?

It was a piece of cake, once a couple of stragglers were chased back out of the yard, and one contrary cow had leveled a path through the bedding sawdust pile, sending a cloud of dust into the bright, sunny, morning air.

At least for the first twenty-five yards.

Until the left front-runner spied the field road, a gateway flanked by fields of dense, cow-height

sudan grass. In an effort worthy of Olympic note, she eased left and melted away into the tall, wet greenery. A couple of copycat cows followed suit, their passage marked only by waving tops of lush foliage.

Each pause to collect stragglers only allows escape time for those still moving on track. Best to keep the rest moving, fast, in the proper direction. So, a couple of us - who were only supposed to guard a space between the garage and the fence - took off running. While the wheeled-horses rounded up and chased the sudan explorers back on track, we trotted those remaining along the pavement path, trusting that no unexpected traffic would come flying down the road and tangle with our drive.

Up the grade, over the ridge and down the other side they went, eyeing the temptation of fields of corn and alfalfa. Attempts to steal off into the stalks for a taste of green corn earned the culprits tasty turnarounds.

Only a few hundred yards to go, the pasture corner in sight. By gosh, this might be simpler than a couple of trailer runs.

And about that time, the whole

pack swerved off to the right, neatly exiting the pavement, to promptly be swallowed by a stand of corn just tall enough to offer cover.

Sweat and leftover morning dew soaked shoes and clothing as paths of waving stalks eventually met in one corner of comfield. A final sweep of waving arms and revving motor brought order to chaos. Trotting hooves and swinging dry udders headed for the dry cow barn, where they knew a hay and chop breakfast awaited exercise-whet appetites. And a figure on three-wheels headed to check fence.

The "minute" had stretched well beyond a half hour.

There are laws against breach of promise, aren't there?



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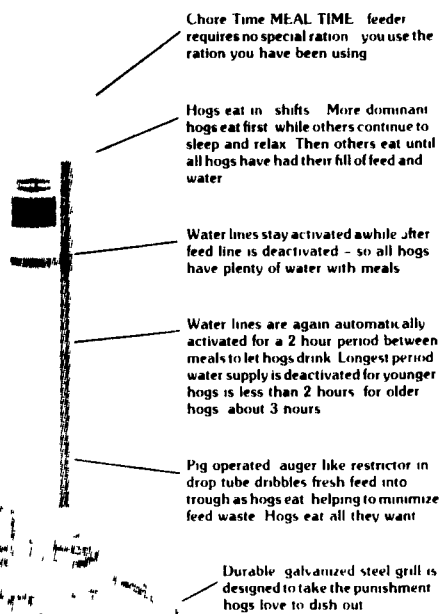
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