

Enjoy Friends And Strengthen Family Ties

PENN STATE (Centre) — Many of us splurge at Christmas, not just on gifts but on parties, decorations, cards and food. The result is not only empty pockets but often exhaustion, stress and frustration. We need to re-evaluate what the Christmas holidays mean to us, says Marilyn Furry, Assistant Professor, Agricultural and Extension Education at Penn State.

The holidays should be a relaxing time to spend with your family, something children need as much as adults do. Furry has found that children want attention from parents who are busy trying to buy gifts, clean the house and decorate the tree. Parents are often at parties or gatherings with friends. The children end up spending time with a babysitter or tired, harried parents.

Too often the responsibility for the holiday is not shared by the family. Buying and wrapping gifts, decorating the home, baking

cookies and mailing cards is usually done by the mother. The rest of the family barely joins in the preparation. If they don't have the Christmas they would like, the mother often feels guilty.

Families need to sit down together and set priorities for holiday activities. Do you need to mail all those cards or bake three extra batches of cookies? Complete only as many things as you can do comfortably. Congratulate yourself for what you've accomplished rather than agonizing about what you haven't done. To spend more time together, some families refuse social invitations after December 15, unless they include the whole family.

Families also need to set realistic expectations about gifts. Stores, television commercials and magazine advertisements start the holiday push earlier and earlier each year. Do you need to buy gifts for everyone? Perhaps you could draw names with friends

and relatives. Set a price limit for gifts and have everyone agree in advance.

If you shop with your children, don't plan to accomplish as much as you could do alone. Take your children shopping with you once or twice as a family activity to see the decorations and shop for one or two things. If you plan to do a lot of shopping, it may be worthwhile to hire a babysitter or exchange babysitting services with a neighbor.

Buy gifts discriminately. Will the gift last? Can it be recycled or repaired? Use your creativity to make gifts. Capitalize on talents such as baking, jelly making, weaving, sewing or wreath mak-

ing. Give a coupon book of favors to be redeemed throughout the year. Another good gift is a donation in the person's name to a local charity or church group.

"Families also need strong holiday traditions so that each year children can say, 'When do we make the wreath?' or decorate the tree?" Furry says. "Do things as a family, not just the mother writing the Christmas cards." Discuss with your family the traditions that are important to them. Be sure to consult your children who need traditions to stabilize the unsettling holiday season. Spread traditions out during the holidays, not just December 25. They may be simple things the family does

together such as decorating the tree or opening the cards together. Include activities not centered around gift giving: take a walk in the woods or call on friends.

Furry also emphasizes an evenly paced holiday season. From Thanksgiving on, sometimes even earlier, the holidays receive a huge buildup. On December 26, the activities drop dramatically. Everyone feels let down and children are left surrounded by a stack of gifts wondering what to do next. Wind down the holiday season gradually. Have some of those get-togethers after the holidays. The tree and other decorations don't have to come down December 26, either.

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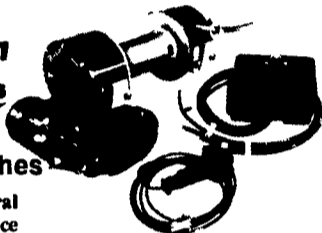
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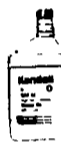
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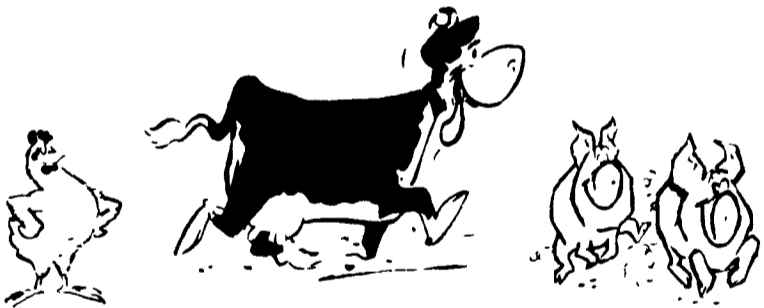
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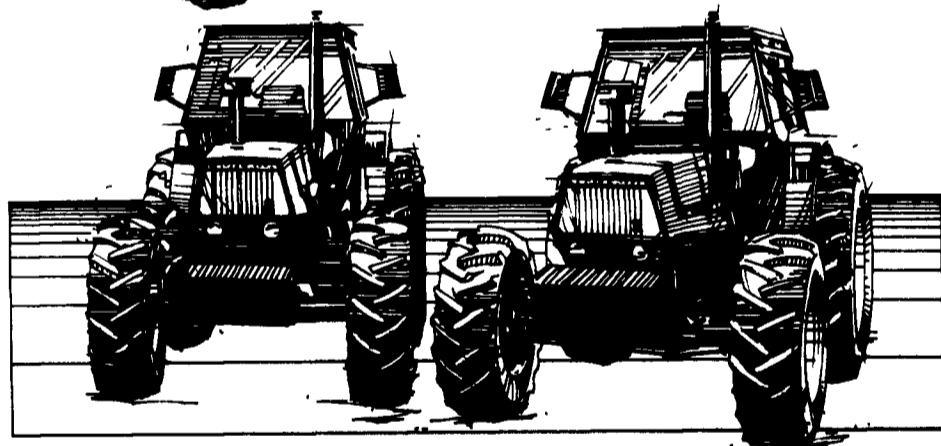
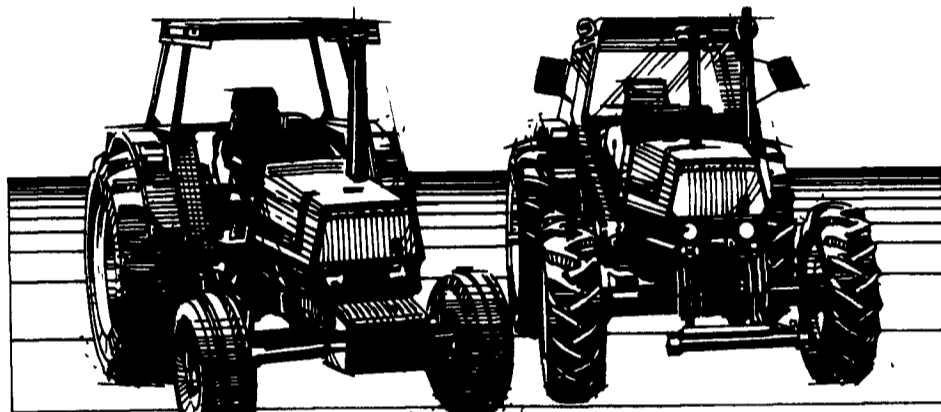
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