

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Only a few cows remained to be milked at the far end of the dairy barn. And, outside, the pale light of dusk was fast fading into night.

Suddenly, the barn interior brightened, as the long rows of florescent fixtures lit up over the feeding alleyways in front of each row of cows.

At almost the same instant, brief "mooring" sounds erupted from scattered spots down the double row of cows. Welcoming greetings they were, acknowledgement of the evening's round of grain feeding which was about to commence.

Though it should be old hat to me by now, the response of the dairy herd to such small happenings still fascinates me. Even though its member makeup changes somewhat constantly, and only a few individuals remain from, say, ten years, the herd's overall reaction to certain stimuli remains constant and predictable. The moment those side-alleyway lights come on in the barn, the

cows take for granted that scoops of their grain ration are forthcoming. And, by gosh, if it isn't forthcoming soon enough, the welcome tone of the mooing abruptly turns loud and demanding, almost bossy you might say.

Feeding of baled hay evokes a similar response. Apparently that gentle "plunk" of a dull pocketknife breaking through a string of baline twine can be heard at a distance of 40 cows away. Or maybe it's the aroma of the hay as the sections fall apart. Or the cloud of hay dust particles that accompanies the task of slicing open bales.

Whatever the reason, hay feeding gets the attention of even the most laid back herd member. Every head comes up, ears perk and staring eyes remain riveted on one's every move until each cow has her share — and in some cases, a little of her neighbors' if she can manage to snag a section and yank it closer to her own trough turf.

Few barn sounds are more satis-

fying to me than the loud rustling of the whole herd of cows chewing their way through a feeding of fragrant alfalfa hay.

Another collective habit practiced by the herd is lying down in their stalls almost as soon as the milkers are removed. Remove the milker, dip the teats, and boom, down goes that cow, almost as if a button were pushed to collapse her legs. Occasionally, one will get off her timing a bit, and flop right down on the milking unit before it's finished the job.

It's not unheard of to have a cow almost flatten you in her rush to rest, as you remove the milking machine.

This is especially noticeable on days when the cows don't get back into their stalls until a bit later in the day than normal. That seems to mess up their late afternoon naptime schedule. Eating and chewing one's cud all day long must be a fatiguing job.

But it's not just the cows which respond to "trigger" sounds.

The clanking of a stainless steel bucket into which we milk fresh cows separately brings a stampede of cats. The slamming sound of the metal milk house door sometimes generates a similar response, but not as dependably as does that ringing tone of the bucket's handle jangling against its side.

Of course, sound of the milk house door might mean anything from milk truck pickup to inspec-

tion to sales people to someone simply wanting to rinse their boots off with the hose. Then, too, it might mean a dish of milk for the cats.

But the milk bucket clanking is almost guarantee of a dish of milk for the cats. And you had better believe those felines figure that out, too. Fast.

Come to think of it, people aren't much different from animals in their response to trigger stimuli.

We have a standing joke in this

family about the call of the ice cream. Like most farmers, our falls sound asleep the moment he stretches out on the couch in front of the TV. Talking to him, asking questions, even the ringing of the phone may never be heard.

But let one of us tiptoe to the kitchen, open the freezer door and mumble under our breath the words "ice cream." That generates an immediate, awakening response.

It might be something we could adapt to the alarm clock industry.

## Diamond Anniversary

WEST CHESTER (Chester) — Chester County Cooperative Extension has announced plans to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Cooperative Extension System. According to Trudy Dougherty, Chester County extension director, the local celebration is part of a national recognition of May 8, 1914, as the beginning of the Cooperative Extension System in the nation.

The local celebration, "Lift Off with Extension", will take place on Saturday, May 6 at Oakbourne Park in Westtown Township and will include a formal opening ceremony at 11:00 a.m. with a 75th anniversary cake served to all in attendance at 11:30 a.m. At noon, a precision skydiving team will land on the green in front of

the mansion at Oakbourne. Other attractions include a family fitness walk, a guided nature trail walk, educational displays highlighting Cooperative Extension's programs, 4-H exhibits and demonstrations, Chester County farm commodity food booths, a model airplane club's exhibition, and a day-long visit from Penn State's Nittany Lion (the same Nittany Lion that prowls the sidelines of Beaver Stadium during each Penn State home football game).

Oakbourne Park is located on Matlack Street, 1 mile east of the intersection with Route 202. The park will be open from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Parking and admission are free. For more information, contact the Chester County Cooperative Extension at 696-3500.

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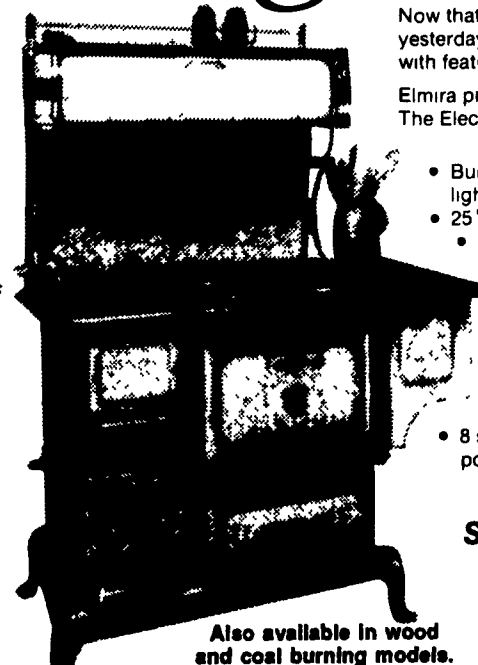



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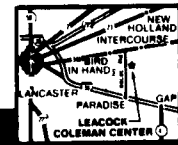
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