

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Regardless of interest levels, idiosyncracies of the stock market, value of the dollar, or the state of your personal allowance, this week we'll all "be in the red."

If you doubt that, just flip through the colorful advertising flyers accompanying your local newspapers or take a quick turn around in just about any sort of shopping arena. It's as though Cupid shot his arrow into the air to shatter the sullen overcast of February and pour cloudbursts of cheery red hearts into this stretch of drab, often damp, mid-winter.

C'mon, you didn't forget did you? If so, it's not too late to ponder a remembrance for your sweetie.

Modern merchandising has made it incredibly easy. It's possible to say a Valentine's Day "I love you!" in an endless array of shades of bright crimson and blazing pink and with textures ranging from glittery foil to shiny ceramic to soft, stuffed, fuzzy, fake fur.

Tops on the list, of course, are long-stemmed roses, a standard symbol of affection. Costly, but definitely high-ranking for making a positive impression.

Yes, indeed, my loved ones have often gifted me with roses. In fact, we're hoping that those of recent years managed to survive

their exposed location in the rose bed even through the December's bitter arctic blasts.

Candy is equally traditional, with lots of retailers already promoting sale prices for those of us to whom money is an object. Heart-shaped boxes of chocolates are perpetual winners despite awareness of their caloric content.

And who can resist the lure of the messages spelled out on the eternally popular "conversation hearts?" Well, apparently this household can. Some months ago, I pitched out the hard, stale, uneaten remains of a pack of candied "Love You," "Be Mine" and "Oh You Kid" confections left from at least two years ago. The reading of these tiny, pastel,

heart-shaped messages obviously proved more appealing than did the eating.

Long gone, too, are the years when it was necessary for this Mom to track down a supply of children's Valentine Day cards for sending to school friends. But, the tradition of trading Valentines at school appears to remain alive and well, and many of these handy packs of cards still include one for the teacher. A quick glance at kids' Valentine cards offers a capsule look at today's popular entertainment trends.

Remember punching out perforated-edged Valentines from big cardboard books, then cutting out and pasting together the envelopes in which to send them? There wasn't a single Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle or Super Mario Brothers card in the whole lot.

Wish I had squirreled away some of those old Valentine cards. They're probably collector items by now.

Actually, we've never been terribly "into" Valentine's Day flowers, candy or gifts, and have never dug very deeply into pocketbooks to support the merchandising of this cheery February holiday.

Most memorable (?) was the pair of "gummy" rats presented me a few years ago by the youngest. Life-sized, one in

orange, the other in bubble-gum flavor, the rats were of the same thick, chewy textured candy made popular by "gummy bears" and "gummy worms."

With such memories, I choose to cherish instead the less obvious "Valentines" periodically dropped into the day-to-day routine of our dairy-farm lifestyle.

Valentines like a bouquet of sweet-smelling lilacs brought in on a tractor from some distant field during May haymaking. Or being summoned for a quick

three-sheeler ride to pasture or fencerow to share in the sighting of an unusual bird. Or having the dishwasher emptied, or the lawn mowed, or the attic cleaned, before I have the chance to get the chore done. Even just a phone call to let me know they'll be home late is a welcome thoughtfulness.

So if you almost forgot Valentine's Day again, just clip this column and present it to your loved one. Just make sure you wrap it first around a bouquet of roses or heart-shaped box of candy

Before Buying House, Attend Workshop

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) P "Steps for Homebuyers," a workshop series on how to buy a house, will be held from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on March 6, 13, 20 at the Farm and Home Center.

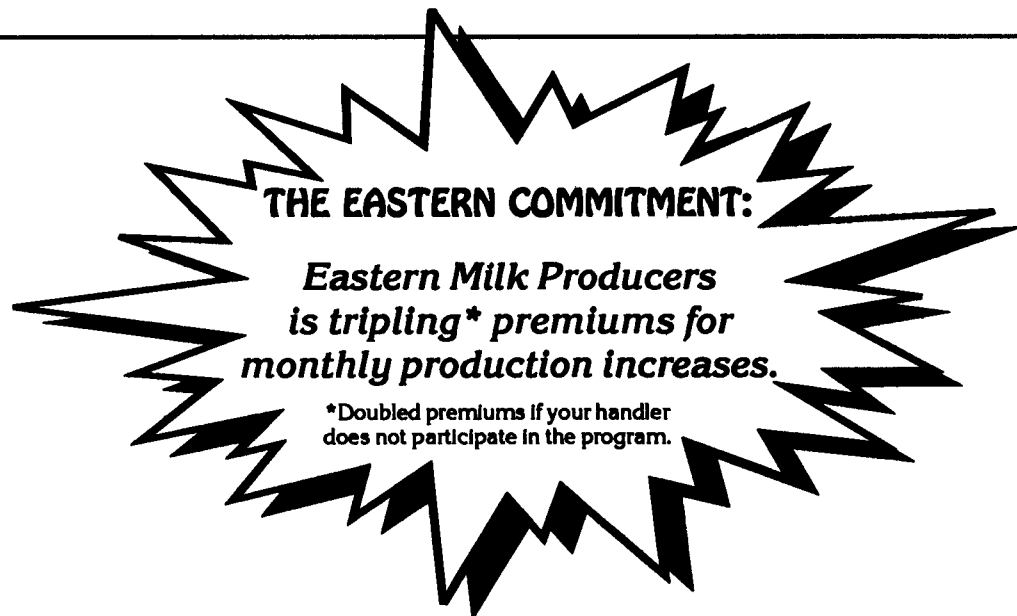
The three-evening series begins Tuesday, March 6, with "Step One: Finding a House to Fit Your Budget," which includes advantages and disadvantages of home ownership, working with a real estate agent, finding out about financing, and setting realistic expectations.

"Step Two: Sizing up the Structure" will be held Tuesday, March 13. Topics covered include assessing structural quality; checking out the electrical, heat-

ing, and plumbing systems; and testing for radon.

The series concludes Tuesday, March 20, with "Step Three: Learning about the Purchase Process." Making the purchase offer, understanding the paperwork, learning about legal aspects, and homeowner's insurance will be discussed.

There is a \$10 registration fee for the course. Make checks payable to Agricultural Extension and mail by February 26 to Penn State Cooperative Extension, 1383 Arcadia Road, Room 1, Lancaster, PA 17601. For more information call 394-6851.



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