

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



The robots are coming! The robots are coming!

Maybe sooner than we think.

For years .... decades .... probably centuries, people who milk cows have periodically pondered what it would be like to not have to cover milking chores twice a day, every day, seven days a week, Christmas, Easter, July Fourth, New Year's Eve, birthday, anniversary, and ad infinitum.

Those far-sighted foreseers who look ahead to science-fiction technology have envisioned for some time the likelihood that the day will come when that very thing will happen. Someday, the speculation proposed, robots will be devised to milk cows, thus eliminating the drudgery (well, on some days it seems that) of twice-a-day, every day, Christmas, Easter, etc.

You can stop chuckling.

The robots are coming. In fact, one has already arrived.

The only one in the world currently resides in the Netherlands. Which is not surprising, in light of the fact that, smart as we like to think we are, much of our "new" technology these days originates elsewhere in the world.

Now the robots are coming into our back yard, with the recent signing of an agreement between the pioneering dairy-robot company, Gascoigne-Mellotte, and the University of Maryland. A research robotic milking setup is reportedly to be in place by the end of the year for use with the University's 150-head milking herd at Clarksville, Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C.

I confess to being "udderly" fascinated with this whole idea.

Computerization, of course, is the foundation of the system. Cows wear electronic identification, already a proven method in today's most ultramodern milking and feeding systems. The computer I.D. signals the unit to allow a cow into the stall, supplies her with an amount of feed dependent on her production, and adjusts the milking units to fit the cow's udder "arrangement". It also signals such things as body temperature, flagging changes which might signify sickness or reproductive cycling.

Udder area is automatically washed and prepped for milking before what the engineers label the "automatic cluster attacher" fastens individual units to each

teat. When milk flow ceases, automation removes the robot milker and disinfects it prior to use on the next herdmate.

Like any other emerging technology, there are undoubtedly numerous "bugs" to work out of the system.

How, I wonder, will it be affected by a nervous newcomer heifer shifting around and "dancing" at the unfamiliar feel of a milking machine. Will there be another robotic arm to soothingly talk to her and gently pat her flank until she feels comfortable with the milking process?

We registered breeders striving to put together good cow families sometimes keep around a few

proven, pedigreed old cows with udders lowered or perhaps tilted with age, due to their ability to produce outstanding offspring. How much problem would be posed by a less than perfect udder? Or how about a high-producing

young cow that may have injured a quarter, but still milks well in the remaining three? Would that fit in the robotic system?

And what about those inevitable high-strung gals, good producers and reproducers, which nevertheless let a foot fly and remove the milkers themselves on occasion? Could you afford a back-up for breakage?

Speculation is that a unit might run upwards of \$90,000 and would obviously be sensitive equipment due to the nature of the technology and mechanics. Can't you just imagine the potential end result of a piece of equipment of that cost and sensitivity when it meets the I-mean-business end of an irate 1,800-pound cow's back foot?

Despite the inevitable hurdles, robot milkers will surely become part of the future dairy business, as routine someday as the once gee-whiz technologies of artificial insemination and embryo transfer.

Yes, indeed, the robots are coming.

But I'm not going to start studying the help-wanted just yet.

**'Search For Spring'  
At State Museum**

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — "SEARCH FOR SPRING" is a new program blossoming at The State Museum on Sunday, March 11 from 1-4 P.M. This festival of esteemed guests and activities highlights the emerging wonders of nature. Museum visitors will see and hear "spring" everywhere. Planned by The Public Services Staff and sponsored by The Friends of The State Museum, all activities are free.

interpretations for the Victorian Art of Florigraphy will invite visitors to paint a "Meadow Mural," hear a fable about the gifts of spring, and solve "Flower Riddles."

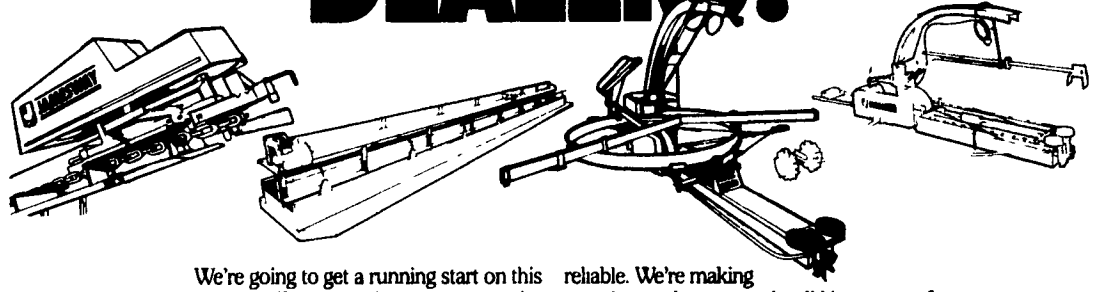
Gene Wengert, a science specialist at Cumberland Valley High School, will show slides and bring animal friends. Audubon Society representative Mary Herrold will assist visitors with bird identification.

Dr. Curtis Barnet and Miriam Meyers, licensed animal rehabilitators, will bring recovering wildlife and discuss their role in returning these animals to the natural habitat. Members of the Penn-Cumberland Garden Club will encourage visitors to sign "The Green Pledge" and consider other ways of conserving our natural resources.

The Barok Folk will provide sounds of spring with their vibrant repertory of traditional music performed on hammer dulcimer, recorder, viol, guitar and piano. Terry Maclay of Nature's Harmony will share the sweet pungent smells of spring herbs and provide visitor's with a spring tonic for tasting. Nan Keenen with her



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