

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Every day is Mother's day on a dairy farm.

Or at least it seems that way. That's because our livelihood, our economic status, our very moment-to-moment way of life revolves around the continuing cycle of motherhood.

For a cow to produce milk, she must deliver a calf. To have that calf, she has to be bred, either artificially, or via the more danger-fraught method of keeping a bull around. To reproduce she must be healthy, get her exercise, avoid stress, and consume large volumes

of tasty foodstuffs in proper balance of TDN (total digestible nutrients), fiber, fats, vitamins, minerals and all that good stuff.

Making sure this all happens as it should entails regular periodic herd reproductive and health checkups, plus occasional emergency calls, by your friendly local large-animal-practice veterinarian, nutritionist, feed consultants, supply personnel, extension experts and a whole retinue of support people. That further entails barn builders, equipment suppliers, truckers, equipment

people, seed companies, fertilizer firms, and on and on.

To say nothing of the twice (someplaces, thrice) daily "middleman," the person or persons who connect the milking equipment to the cow, transferring the white lifeblood of motherhood from the cow's production output unit to an automatically cooled tank.

And not to forget all those folks that handle, process and market it after it leaves the milk house.

This motherhood stuff sure keeps a lot of people busy.

But all mothers need a break, a rest period, a little vacation time. We send ours to the dry cow "rest farm" over the hill and down the road a piece, where expectant mothers go to condition their bodies for delivery and await their blessed events.

There they can lounge their days away in the pasture or on the straw bedding of the barn, soak up sunshine and nibble grass, hay and silage. No schedule, no structure.

But are they happy in this environment of all play and no work?

Apparently not. Every few days, or at least recently, these vacationing mothers make a break

for greener pastures beyond the "rest farm." They miss their family, they miss their friends, they miss their work.

Actually what they miss most are hearty scoops of high-protein dairy ration feed, a necessity for our milking mothers, but forbidden, fattening food on the conditioning diet for dry cows.

Occasionally our mothers-to-be put on a protest march against their restrictive impending-motherhood diets, and make a break to stampede the quarter-mile back home to the dairy barn. Or they just go off their diets and chomp up whatever they can find in the closest fields.

Sometimes they apparently run off for the sheer excitement of it, like a recent rainy evening we arrived home just after dark to find the house surrounded by 20-plus expectant mothers. We suspect their plan had been to hold us cap-

tive inside and bargain for extra rations of sweet feed — a strict no-no on their dry-cow diets.

They turned tail and made tracks when we arrived on the scene. As you may have figured, the tracks remain all over the lawn, along with a few other souvenirs of their aborted hostage attempt.

But the transgressions of the marauding mothers-to-be are forgiven and forgotten as the everyday miracle of birth begins the cycle again. Even after a quarter-century of delivering and caring for these four-legged babies and their mothers, we still take great joy and satisfaction in a warm, wet newborn calf lifting a wobbly head.

Motherhood. It really is a miracle.

Seems fitting that, at least once a year, we pause to pay tribute to that.



## Spring Fling

SCRANTON (Lackawanna Co.) — If you would like to learn how to exercise and get a good workout, plan to attend Penn State Cooperative Extension's "Spring Fling" on Wednesday, May 16, at Keystone Junior College from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Vince Brust, owner of Vince Brust studios, will discuss exercise and how to get physically fit.

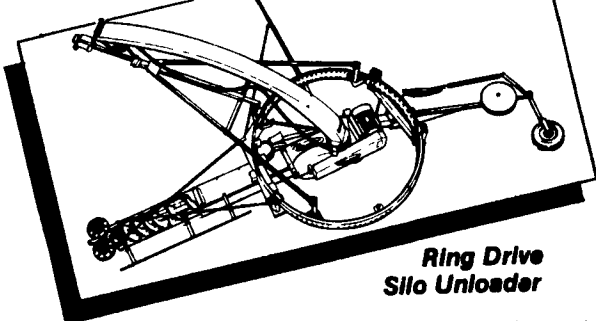
The event will also feature Joyce Hatala, Lackawanna County recycling coordinator. In addition, Pam Brown of Milton, will present a picturesque slide program sharing her experiences in Kenya.

Reservations are \$8 which includes lunch and speaker fees. For more information or to make reservations, call the Penn State Cooperative Extension office at 963-6842 by May 9.



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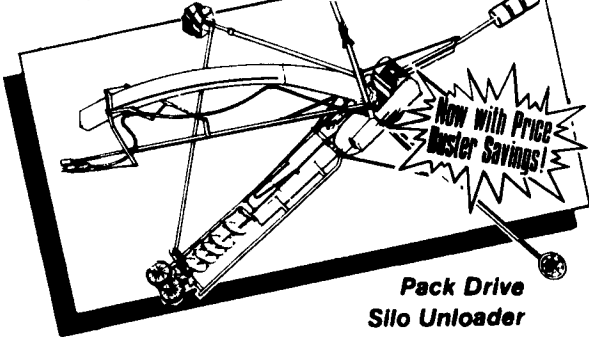
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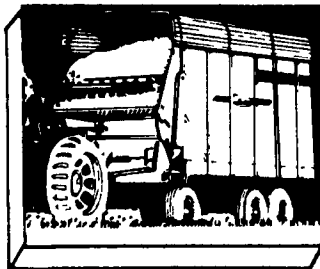
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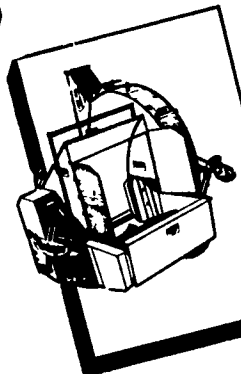


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