

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



Though it has never been officially confirmed in any way, we've long suspected that the animals on this place are taking (have taken) over.
Consider that we fit our whole lifestyle around cows. We set the alarm for their early morning milking, juggle meals around the demands of their daily routine and drop anything we're doing at any time to rush to their emergency

needs, like problem calvings. We fetch grain in and haul manure out, stash away tons of forage and hand deliver it via chains, augers, and carts. Our nutritionists balance protein, energy, dry matter intake and minerals so that the cows probably eat a more balanced diet than most of the world's population. And, vets still make house, or barn calls to address the herd's health needs.

But it isn't just the cows that have taken over. Our few remaining chickens and the five guineas have no production responsibilities, like laying eggs. Their purpose in life is to..... I'm not sure they have one, except to chase bugs in the meadow, roll in the sun-warmed dust and crow about it to the world. The cats are supposed to patrol the barns for mice. Mostly they lounge around in soft straw and wait for their morning and evening rations of milk and food. On occasion, one might snag a mouse. Usually after I've moved a bale, spotted a mouse and rounded up the nearest snoozing cat. Monk, the house cat is even worse. She'll chase a mouse but has no idea that her claws she uses to shred the stairway wallpaper have any other purpose. Lately she's taken to hiding upstairs just before bedtime, then sneaking onto the bed after we're sound asleep. Or, she'll scratch and whine at the door when her accurate inner clock senses that our morning wakeup and her food

dish restocking are imminent. And the two bunnies (yes, now we have TWO) do absolutely nothing but eat and sleep - and escape to hop around the yard at every opportunity. Given the reputation of rabbits, it's probably best if Ben (a female?) and Norman (with camouflage coloration) stick to eating, sleeping and an occasional game of hide-n-seek under the hosta leaves. Pound for pound, though, no animal rules the roost around here any more than Solomon. Just another family member, equipped with four legs instead of two Solomon is the farm's self-appointed guardian, early warning ground-hop alert system, visitor greeter, cow chaser, tomcat-fight referee, meadow patrolman, rides shotgun on the pickup and is a loving companion to all of us. This pooch has his own toys, his own food and dishes, his own brush, his own skin allergy medications, his own pocket of health records rivaling those of the kids when they were little. And, now he gets mail.

spotted the addressee: Solomon Bupp. Complete with proper address and accurate ZIP code. He's even been assigned a computer number - 005704903 391 S. Is that a driver's license (he does love vehicles)? He already had his own official, up-to-date dog license number and that's different. Social Security number? Nah, wrong groupings of numbers, spaces and no dashes. And what does the "S" stand for? Sweetheart? He is one. Security guard? He takes that job very seriously. Or maybe "smelly" - which he definitely is after running through damp grass and then wanting to snuggle close. Phew! Turned out the container had a sample of a "premium" dog food - to which the dog turns up his nose -, a questionnaire which doesn't have enough room in the check-off boxes for even a chihuahua-size paw print and a dollar-off coupon that he couldn't possibly redeem because supermarkets don't allow dogs inside. Delivering an occasional piece of mail for the dog is apparently all part of a day's work for our rural mail carrier. But I wonder. As the animals take over, is junk mail for cows the next step?



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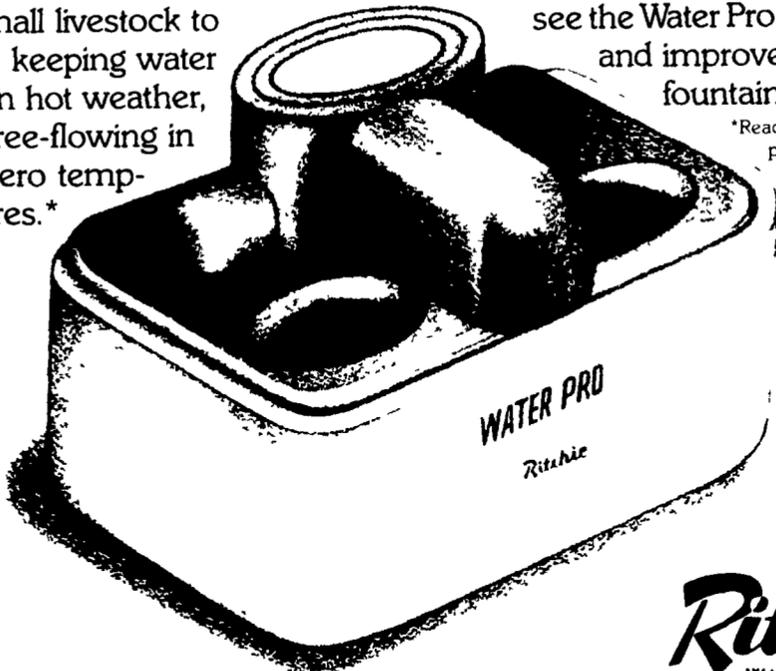
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