

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Tiny, she is. Petite. But perfect. Mostly black, with a sort of heart-shaped white spot centered on her forehead. Weighs maybe 70 pounds. Bawls with vocal cords befitting a half-grown heifer. Wants to eat...now! Not satisfied with the fresh mama's milk I bottle-feed her morning and evening, she's already begun nibbling at sweet calf-starter grain. At three days of age. Amazing. No, make that miraculous. She was never expected to be born in the first place. In fact, she was never even expected to have been conceived. Her mother's a sixteen-and-a-half-year old. Cow, that is. Not many sixteen-year-old milking dairy cows around. Oldest we've ever had in our 28 years as dairymen. Average age of milking cows is more in the neighborhood of five, maybe six. A ten-year-old still producing and reproducing is commendable. Thirteen is unusual. Sixteen is...like, wow! Of course, we were awed when Pushkin calved more than two

years ago with a heifer, the herd matron at 14. We'd never expected this durable homebred to ever calve again. In fact, we were so sure of that, we named that calf Pushkin. That daughter calved a few months ago and joined the herd with a raft of relatives. She's been dubbed Pushkin II, so we can keep track of who's who. Pushkin - the original - is more affectionally known as Grandma. Our affection, not hers. She's not really an affectionate cow. Tame and tolerant, sturdy and durable, relatively problem-free. Just not a

friendly pet. The calf is smaller than most of our newborns, probably because Pushkin just didn't put on much extra dry-period weight. That was probably a blessing. It made calving much easier for a matron of her age, and neither she nor the calf experienced any of the post-calving complications that sometimes follow deliveries of hundred-pound-plus babies. Pushkin was the first heifer calf named after we returned from a European farm tour that included a five-day visit to Russia. Having been exposed to what seemed like endless statues, pictures, tributes, etc. to this noted Russia poet, the name Pushkin was indelibly etched into our brains - and promptly went into the calf book when we needed a name starting with the letter "P". Perhaps the statues of Pushkin have by now fallen, along with those of Lenin and Stalin. But our prized Pushkin will live on regardless of world politics because she's been one of the most prolific heifer sources of the herd. After her latest calving, we did some digging back through our old records, gathering some Pushkin statistical data. This wonderful old friend has given us nine daughters, some of them outstand-

ing animals with her durability. One was sold to a friend. A few left the herd for various health problems, including one with an elongated lower jaw which prevented her from eating properly. All totaled, we came up with 26 Pushkin daughters, granddaughters, great granddaughters, and great-great granddaughters. She also had two sisters with numerous offspring - thus our shortage of "P" names.

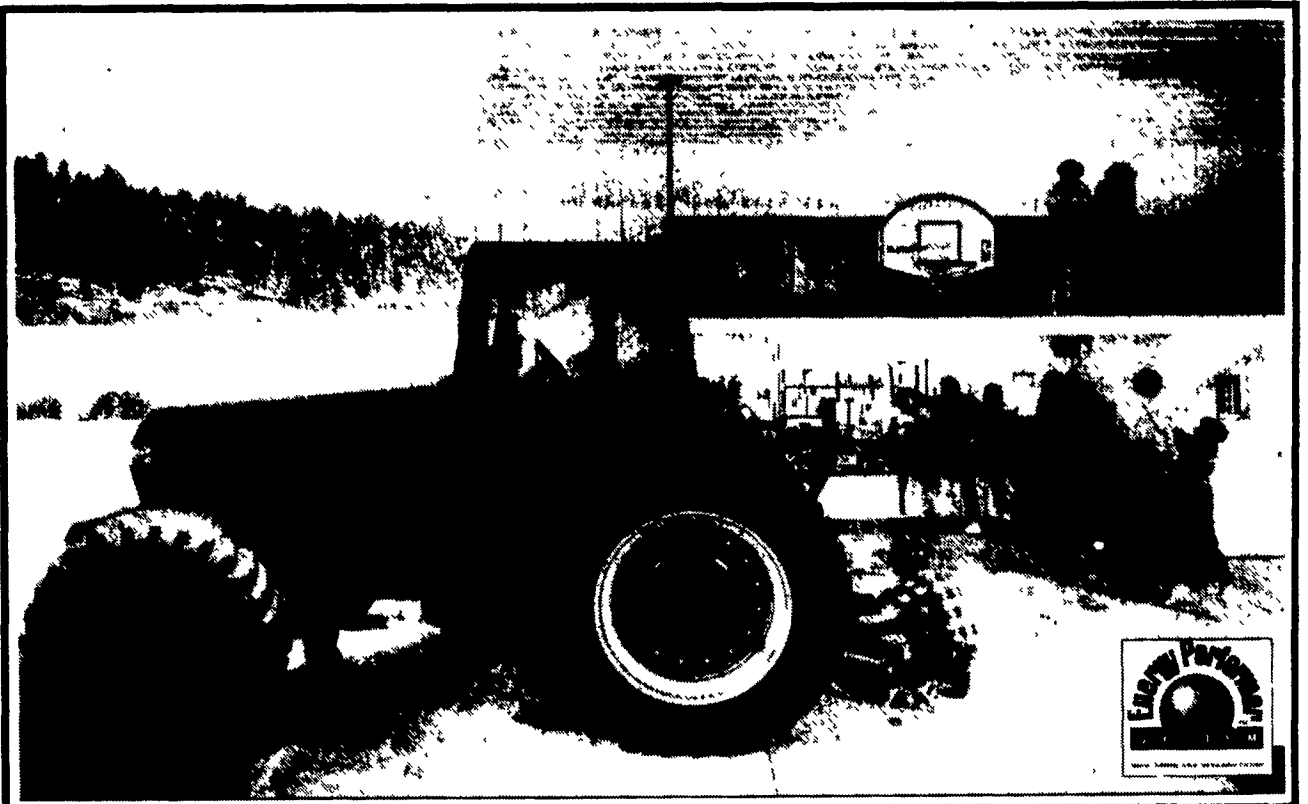
Now beginning her dozenth milking lactation, Pushkin has produced some 220,000 pounds of milk to date. That's more than 25,500 gallons of milk, or nearly five tractor-trailer tanks worth. Seems like this new calf should have a special, appropriate name. Our younger farmer has laughingly suggested Persistent. We could reuse Prize, Pride, Proud, or Precious. How about Priceless? This one will take some thought.

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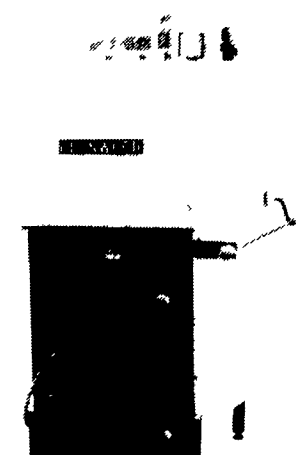




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