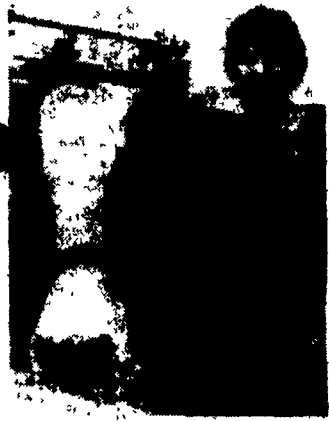


On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Some things in life seem as certain as the sun.

Like, taxes will go up, not down. Or, traffic will travel a minimum of five miles over the posted speed limit. And dandelions will smile at you from your lawn a mere half-hour after you've finished cutting the grass.

Here on the farm, certain "givens" are just as dependable.

For instance, sooner or later, come warm weather, Mama Gray

will arrive at the barn cat-feeding dish with a couple of chubby, toddler kittens in tow.

The manure-hauling truck will get stuck somewhere and need towed out. (With this spring's exceptionally wet weather, the first step is determining whether that's a medium-sized or large tractor stuck.

And the heifers will get out.

Heifers are like the young of most species. Curious. Spunky.

Full of energy and exuberance. Especially tempted by the forbidden. For heifers, the forbidden is the far side of the fence.

Our older-heifer herd presently roams a spacious, green meadow. Lots of trees, plentiful water and exceptionally lush grass is supplemented with big bales of hay and feedings of corn silage.

What more could a heifer want? Out.

Out — the forbidden side of the fence — may appeal for numerous reasons. The grass may truly be greener there, especially after the herd has grazed the meadow for a few days and eaten the most lush, most tender, most gourmet clumps. Sort of like eating the french fries first and then dawdling over the brussels sprouts.

In their search for gourmet grass, they nibble under, over, or if the slightest break exists, through the fence. Sooner or later, the irresistible force of a thousand-pound heifer stretching under a fence strains its breaking point and PING! goes the fence. A couple of PINGS! and you've got

a hole.

White-tailed deer are an increasing problem creating fence PINGS! as they bound over the boundaries. It happens even in our area of the country, where deer are still a thrill and not a costly crop-destruction element.

Springtime's rapid plant growth coupled with showers also spells fencing fears, in the case of electric fence. As weeds and grasses along pastures and fencerows push taller, their tips often make contact with the fencing strands. When rains wet the green foliage touching the strands, it grounds the electric current and "defuses" the fence — an electronic PING!

Whatever the reason — shoving for greener grass, electronic PINGS!, dancing deer feet or all the above — we are experiencing our annual "Heifers out!" season, testing aggravation levels and the maneuverability of the faithful three-wheeler.

"Heifers out!" season reached a new high on a recent Saturday night. Make that Sunday morning. Or to be exact, 1:30 a.m., when pounding on the front door woke

both of us simultaneously from a sound slumber to exclaim in unison: "Heifers out!"

It was an accurate guess. The instant our light snapped on, a voice shouted up to us that there were cows visiting the factory about a half-mile away, on the distant side of the heifers' meadow. When The Farmer returned many minutes later, he noted that he'd found only two snooping around the industrial structures; the others were resting on the lawn of the adjacent farmhouse.

Next morning, after church, I heard why they were resting; A friend confided that, when he was returning to his home sometime after midnight, about two dozen heifers could be seen strolling around the manufacturing facility's lawn. Guess they got tired and went home.

To whomever pounded on our front door in the middle of the night — thanks!

Experience has given us the answer to that pressing philosophical question: "Where's the beef?"

Somewhere it has absolutely no business being. I'll betcha'.

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