

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



Rain pattered on the metal roof, a gentle staccato rhythm softening other sounds from the outside.

The calves and young heifers had quieted, their bellies swelling full with rations of grain and the alfalfa hay they busily chewed. Only bedding of their pens with fresh, shiny straw remained to be done before my morning barn chores would be finished.

From a perch high up, near the rafters, I paused to catch my breath. Our winter supply of straw in the center haymow of the barn is still blessedly plentiful and stacked to near the roof. After scrambling up over the stack of hay bales, ducking a rafter while crawling over a crossbeam and then hoisting myself onto the uppermost row of straw bales, I sat there a moment enjoying the barn's secure peacefulness from this pigeon's-eye-view perch.

With good aim and a little luck, you can toss sections of straw bales from this high launch point, across the empty adjoining haymow and right through the hayhole to the heifer pen beneath it.

Young heifers are housed in the bank barn's bottom floor, with hay and straw supplies stacked in the mows of the upper level. Bales can then be dropped through conveniently-located holes in the floor to the feed alleyway and

pens beneath.

As we use layers of hay and straw bales, working down from the top, it's handy to leave a stair-step effect along one edge for climbing up and down. So having scaled the bale-steps up the side of the hay to crawl into the top of the straw supply, I rewarded myself by stealing a moment to catch my breath and enjoy the peaceful setting and the soothing sound of the rain overhead.

I love old barns. They have a character about them lacking in the sleeker-lined metal and block structures of today. Old barns are a tribute to an age of down-home engineering, constructions raised with common sense, craftsmanship, quality and artistry, minus blueprint or computer-assisted design.

In our old German-style bank barn, you can still feel the axe-hewn cuts on the rough-squared main beams, finger the bark on main-frame logs, and marvel at the sturdy wooden pegs fashioned to fasten together the main "bones" of the barn's skeletal strength.

In addition to the major job of housing cattle and various feed-stuffs, the old barn fulfills various lesser roles. Equipment is put there on temporary basis during

the busy season. A vacant bay-mow floor becomes a handy shelter for the baler or a wagonful of hay hustled in from the field as a thunderstorm bursts in over the hills.

The cats find a haven in the old barn, becoming furry piles with several heads, napping together in snug, straw beds. Solomon sometimes follows suit, turning in repeated circles in classic dog fashion before curling up on a cushion of loose hay.

Each spring, an old broody hen will hatch out a nest of diminutive, downy baby chicks from a nest buried deep in hay or straw. The guineas screech as they fly into the barn at night to roost, while pigeons softly coo from their perches on the metal remains of old hay-handling systems, still fastened near the barn roof peak.

Old barns become receptacles for stuff you still need but use only on occasion — odds-and-ends of lumber, cattle show beds and rubber wash tubs, used feed bags and collections of baling twine, bags of lime and fly dust, an old chicken coop.

After years as catchalls, old barns may be treasure troves, in whose dark corners may be unearthed antique tools, old hand-operated or early-era farm equipment, long-forgotten horse-hitch hookups, battered milk cans.

With that thought, I toss down a couple of straw bales and slide back down the hay-steps to the barn floor before someone wanders in and finds me goofing off, 15 feet up in the straw mow.

I might get accused of napping. Or worse, be labeled as just another antique, sitting around an old barn collecting dust.



## School Program Focuses On Challenges

NEWARK, Del. — What do bats, human population growth, Mylar-packaged potato chips and biotechnology have in common? Every one is related to agriculture.

There is little in the world today that is not somehow related to agriculture. This statement sums up the new educational program — The World Around Us: Challenges and Changes in Agriculture — being offered by the University of Delaware College of Agricultural Sciences to high school students and teachers.

The presentation, designed to fill one class period, uses demonstrations and everyday examples to point up the impact agriculture has on our lives. The program is the brainchild of Karen Roth, assistant to the dean and the program presenter.

"Agriculture is about feeding the world, solving problems, conserving our resources and improving the quality of life for all of us. Yet many people still have a limited perception of it," says Roth. "As I visited high schools, telling students about what the College of Agricultural Sciences has to offer, I discovered a basic lack of understanding. People have this misconception of a farmer being this dopey guy with a pitchfork, as depicted in Grant Wood's painting, American Gothic."

And it isn't just the students who don't understand. Roth says she's encountered a number of science teachers and guidance counselors who don't view agriculture as relevant to college-preparatory students.

Roth realized that recruiting was a premature step if the field itself is misunderstood. She came up with a presentation in which she dispels myths about agricul-

ture and reinforces its scope in a 50-minute class period.

"I want students to see the connection between the courses they take and agriculture," Roth says. "In biology when they discuss photosynthesis — that's agriculture. Agricultural engineers develop ways to limit pollution, agricultural economists calculate trends in international trade, and some of the most advanced genetic engineering and microbiology research is going on in agriculture."

To announce the availability of the program, Roth targeted guidance counselors and science teachers in high schools throughout Delaware and specific areas in nearby Maryland and Pennsylvania.

In September, the first month it was offered, she was asked to give 25 presentations to chemistry, biology and agriculture classes. Teachers and students have been enthusiastic and receptive to the presentation. Roth designed the program for high school audiences, but now she plans to offer it to the junior high level.

"My dream would be to be in a different high school every day of the year spreading the news about agriculture," Roth says. "Agriculture is an important discipline, touching every part of our lives, every day, from bioethics to landscape design, from pest control to microwave popcorn. With this program I feel I'm finally getting somewhere in changing people's attitudes about the wide world of agriculture."

For more information on The World Around Us: Challenges and Changes in Agriculture program, call Roth at (302) 831-2508.

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