

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



A hint of "empty nest syndrome" always haunts my maternal instincts this time of year.

That's because our nestlings have soared away on their own wings, leaving me behind with no one to help cook, color, hunt, and hide those eggs that figure prominently into the season. Nor are there as many justifiable excuses for laying in nest supplies — like chocolate bunnies, marshmallow peeps, and jelly beans.

But if the house nest is less occupied by nestlings (though much of their "nesting materials" remain behind under Mother and Father Bird's wings), the rest of the farmstead overflows with nests in abundance.

As the thick ice on the pond melted out under warming sunshine and gentler breezes, weather damage became apparent at one of the farmstead's prime nesting sites. A glance toward the pond early one morning, to check the presence of our new Canada goose resident pair, warned of the nest's imminent disappearance.

The covered platform The Farmer had installed mid-pond several springs ago was tilting at a steep angle into the water. Apparently the freeze-expansion of the ice had separated the platform from the supporting posts sunk into the pond bottom.

And the geese were already exploring and poking around what little bit of the structure remained above the water surface.

So it came to be that, on a brisk, late-March morning, we paddled the canoe through still-icy waters to make repairs. Carefully balancing our weight in the "tippy" craft, we lifted, wired and respiked the structure to the supports — an unplanned swim had no appeal.

Then, while I steadied the canoe with one paddle, The Farmer used the other to lift out the soggy, rotted old nest materials from the platform floor. Then we turned the boat and I stuffed onto the platform a thick pile of grass hay we'd brought along to refurbish the nest.

The geese honked furiously from the pond bank during the few minutes it took us to repair and refurbish the nest site. As we paddled back to the pier, they passed us on their way out to inspect the "island."

And before we were halfway back to the house, the female was in the nest, busily rearranging grass with her beak.

Less visible but farther under-way are nesting efforts in the old bank barn.

Near one corner of the upper floor of the bank barn is a large opening where big, round bales of bedding can be dropped into the heifer pen beneath. Between that access opening and the wall is a narrow, maybe eight-inch-wide, ledge. On that narrow ledge sits a small black hen, hatching out a nest of eggs. It's a precarious homesite; one misstep out of the nest and she'll be airborne.

Just across the bedding access hole sits a wagonload of hay that has been parked there through the winter. While leaning against the wagon, pondering if we should relocate the black hen's narrow-ledge nest site, something caught my eye.

Barely a foot away, at eye level, a pair of beady black eyes gazed back at mine. My immediate reaction was to duck, but the honey-colored hen never moved. How she plans to get her chicks from his nest, hunkered down deep in



The Martin kids with Willy's Finnsheep lambs. All five were born to one mother. The children are, Sarah, Willy, Tim, and Louie.

Willy's Finnsheep Gives Birth To Five Lambs

LINDA WILLIAMS
Bedford Co. Correspondent
SCHELLSBURG (Bedford Co.) — Nine-year-old Willy Martin has been especially happy with his own small flock of sheep this spring.

One of his ewe Finnsheep had five lambs at one time. Willy says Finnsheep are noted for having more than one lamb at a time. "Dad says he read somewhere that one ewe had eight," he says. "But three or four are more common, I am really happy with five."

Willy has three ewes, three rams, and 11 lambs of his own.

he straw bales several feet up in the wagon, is a mystery.

And I used to think the kids came up with strange places to hide eggs....

Finnsheep have very long and fine wool which Willy feels should be good for spinning.

Willy lives on a 107-acre sheep farm with his dad and mom, Dave and Karen, his brothers, Louie, 10; and Tim, 4; and one sister, Sarah, 7. Willie, Louie, and Sarah all attend the Chestnut Ridge School.

Louie has three rams and three ewes, all Dorsets. The ewes will have lambs later this spring.

Both Louie and Willy help with feeding and shearing their own sheep. "These boys take a lot of pride in their sheep," says their dad.

They are very particular about what their sheep eat because they know this is what makes healthy sheep which have healthy lambs:

The family grows all of the hay

and most of the grain which the sheep eat. They pasture them as long as possible.

The boys enter their sheep in the Bedford County Fair, and this coming year, will be old enough to participate in the prize divisions.

Louie and Willy also have pig projects for 4-H which won them a second-place award at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show. They also placed first and second at Keystone competition. Both are members of the Shawnee Lakers 4-H Club.

Finnsheep were originally imported from Finland, a Scandinavian country located in the far northern part of Europe. The Finnish people are well known for their farming abilities, especially dairy animals and sheep.

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