

On being a farm wife -And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



What a treat to throw open the doors and welcome in the daylight.

Opening up the house doors to let in springtime warmth and sunshine has always seemed to me the equivalent of turning the page to a new chapter of time. Suddenly the barrier between inside and outside living is greatly diminished and the porch beckons us to "come, sit a spell."

Equally welcome is the return of wide-open barn doors. An overhead garage-type door at one end and wide, sliding doors at the other permit a free-flow of air and

unobstructed vision down the center alley of the dairy barn. Doors flung wide allow us to enjoy the outdoor freshness and better keeping taps on what's happening on the farmstead outside during milking hours.

And, when you're outside working in the yard, the see-thru effect of the open doors offers a quicker tip-off if one of the four-legged girls is somewhere she isn't supposed to be.

Moving perennials from one border to another a few days ago, I glanced toward the open dairy barn door and spotted a cow stand-

ing just inside the entrance, calmly munching haylage from one of the boxstall feed troughs.

"Best, what are you doing out there?" I growled at the big, old cow surveying the scenery while she pilfered a herdmate's chow.

Our dairy barn boxstall doors are each fastened with an "L" shaped piece of half-inch steel rod that slides through sections of pipe welded to the gate and the stall sides. A few of our more clever cows have learned to wrap their tongues around the shorter, handle part of the "L" and yank it from the pipe closure. When the gate swings open, the escapee will then take a stroll around the dairy barn, ultimately ending up at a feed cart with her big black and white muzzle buried deep in the grain.

Not only is this irritating to us cow caretakers, it is dangerous to the cow. Overeating of grain can result in serious stomach disorders and sometimes costly and unhealthy side effects.

On the pen presently shared by old cows Best and Marvina, the "L" shaped closure has been replaced by a large bolt, a deterrent to these veterans of the bovine-tongue-escape trick. How-

ever, if the bolt is not pushed tightly against the pipe into which it fits, these girls can still yank it free.

As I headed toward the barn to corral the chomping escapee, she began strolling the other way, headed for the long center alley between the two rows of stalls. So, I slipped in through the side door, effectively cutting her "off at the pass." So tame is Best and so used to going into her pen that she promptly returned to it, even though the main door a dozen feet away was still wide open.

Then I realized that Marvina was missing as well. A glance down the feed alley in front of one row of stalls confirmed my suspicion. Way down near the far end of the barn, Marvina was sampling each bale of alfalfa hay stacked along the wall as she mosed past. A sort of hay-tasting party, if you

will. With bites of other hay in between as a palate cleanser.

I trotted down the center alley, whipped around the end of the row of cows and headed toward Marvina. She glanced up, took one last yank of alfalfa, turned tail and began hoofing it toward her pen.

Halfway there, she paused a split second to grab a mouthful of feed from the grain cart, haughtily tossed her head in my direction, then lifted her tail and left me dodging manure souvenirs the rest of the way to her pen.

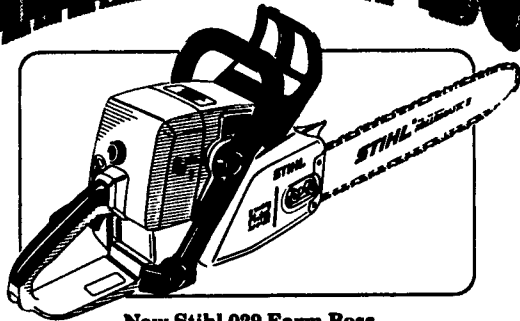
Even more aggravating than a clever cow is an arrogant, clever cow.

"You're something," I grumbled to her as she ambled into her pen and stood there while I patted her long, smooth neck.

The expression on her face looked suspiciously like a smirk.



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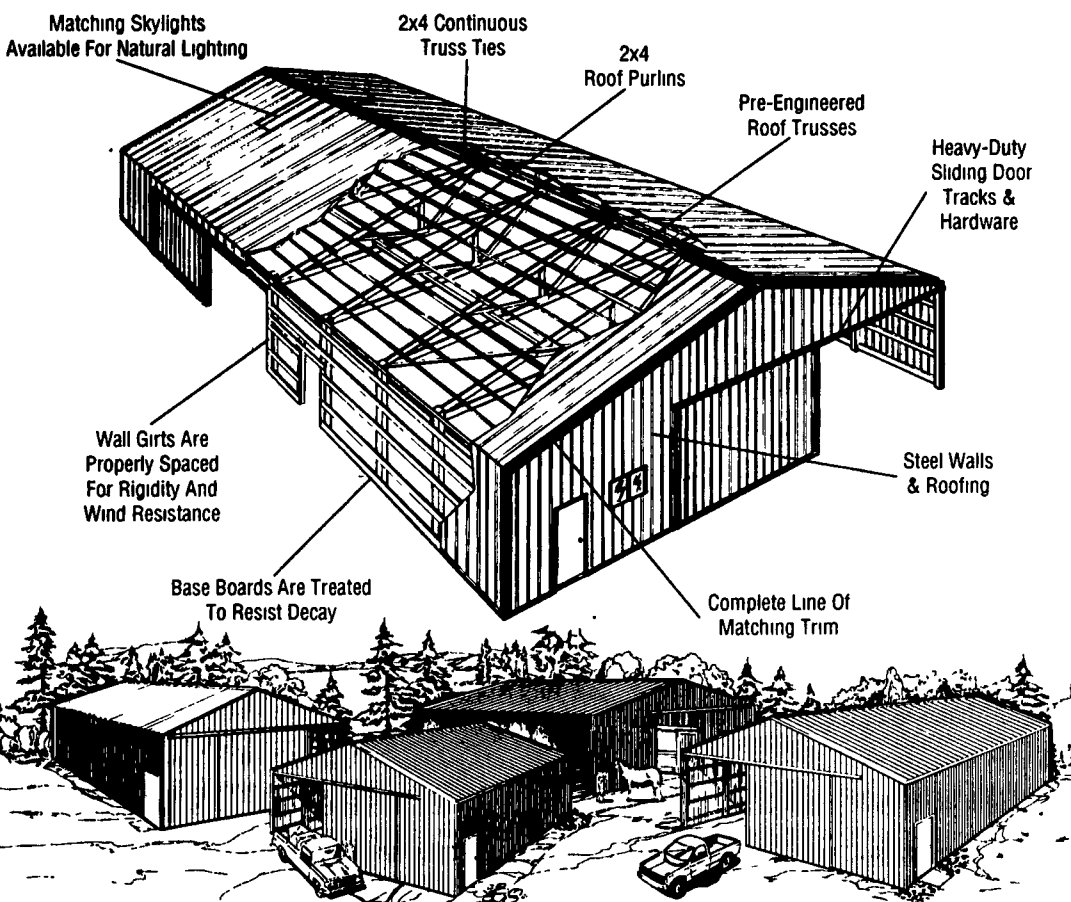
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