

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Dusk. My favorite time of day. The time of day — especially through this hectic planting season — when you begin to slow down, pause and reflect on the how many more acres of corn planting are completed.

Mulching the garden at dusk on this chilly, May evening, I reflected that we were far from finished planting corn or even the day's chores. The Farmer was still running a disk ahead of the planting equipment, evening feeding of the dairy herd was yet to be completed — and there was a brand new calf in the maternity pasture. While I'd missed seeing Mellis and her calf at milking time, they were clearly visible from the garden. The fork, the wheelbarrow and mulching

progress were temporarily set aside while I returned to the barn to thaw some frozen colostrum, to make sure the baby had that critical first meal of rich nutrients and antibodies against disease.

Dusk was deepening by the time the colostrum was thawed and warmed. I slipped out the back of the barn quietly, avoiding Solomon. Protective cow mothers and dogs are not a compatible combination. Even with the most gentle of our old cows, I have great respect for the protective, mothering instinct.

This was the second calving for Mellis, the new mother; and her pretty, almost-all-white baby was a welcome heifer calf. Though Mellis watched me like the pro-

verbial hawk, kept moving around her baby and making irritated, short mooing warnings, I didn't feel threatened by her.

Strong and healthy, the calf showed not the slightest interest in nursing the bottle and Mellis kept coaxing her away. After trying to corral the newborn for several minutes and not succeeding in generating an ounce of cooperation, I was about ready to bag the whole business.

A long, low bawling sound went up from about 50 yards away and I glanced up — to see a large, black animal headed right for me. The bull.

How foolish of me. That he had been moved into this pasture with the springing cows and heifers had never entered my mind, even though I had known he'd been temporarily removed from the heifer herd.

His name is Bold; I wasn't anxious to find out how aggressively he would live up to it. In the brief time he'd been in with the heifers, Bold had been well-behaved and non-aggressive to people. But, it was nearly dark, there was a somewhat agitated cow, a new-

born calf, and this pesty two-legged interloper fussing around the pair of them. (And no one knew where I was — not even the dog.)

Bold came trotting to do what bulls do — protect his charges. Though he's just a youngster, not much over a year and weighing less than a thousand pounds, bulls are NEVER to be taken lightly. The pasture is along the woods, with lots of old limbs on the ground. Grabbing a thick solid stick in my hand, I began backing toward the fence that divides the lots.

Bold took a couple more warning steps in my direction. I picked up another stick and winged it at his head. When the stick connect-

ed, he turned tail, took off toward the other corner of the pasture, making bawling, complaining, noises.

Despite my pounding heart and shaky knees, I had to laugh. What a wimp.

Thank heaven! And believe me, I did, walking back to the barn still clutching the stick, hanging close to the fence — and keeping an eye on the bull, rapidly disappearing in the dusk toward the cluster of animals in the far corner of the pasture.

Dusk. Time for reflections. Methinks I better reflect on paying closer attention to where the bull is. Even a wimpy Bold one.

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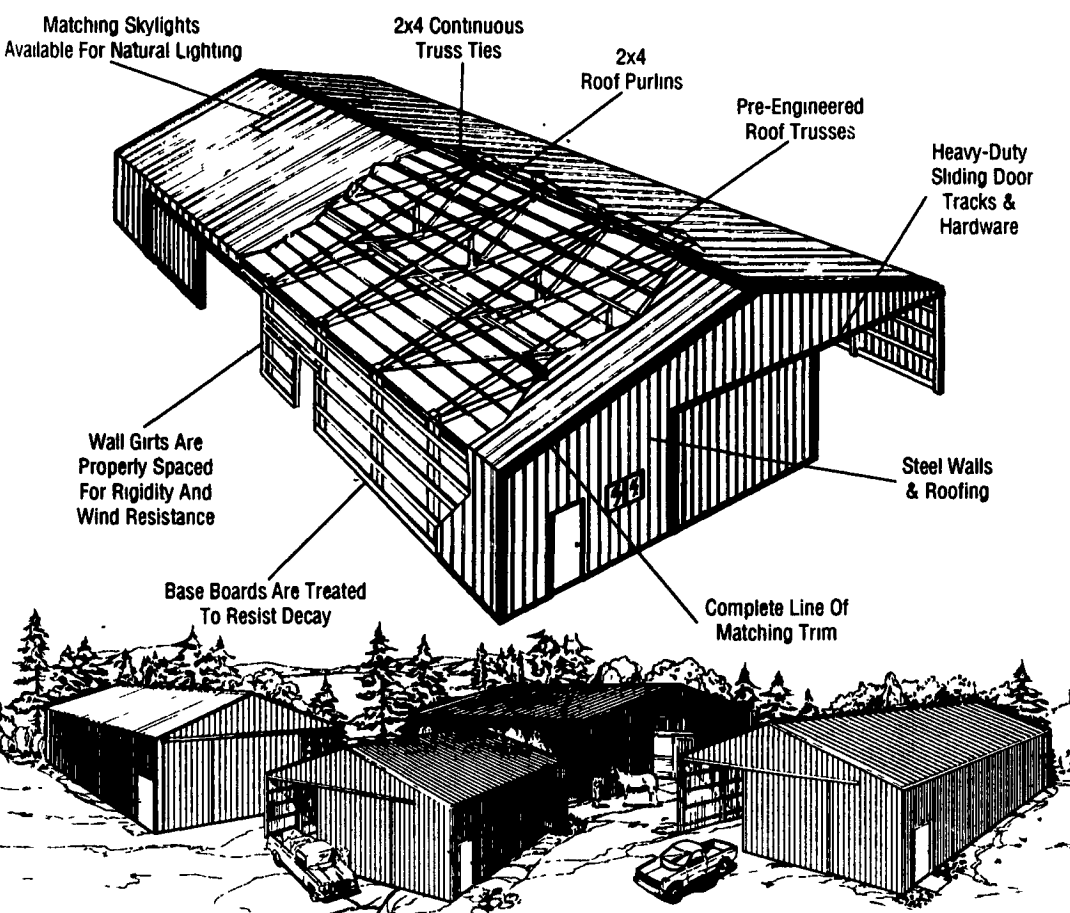
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