

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Weathermen call them the "three Hs." Hazy. Hot. Humid.

Corn thrives on the "three Hs" growing what seems like inches every day, so long as adequate moisture is available in the ground. When it isn't, whole field populations of corn plants curl their leaves tightly, making less surface exposed to the blasting heat and conserving what moisture is in the plant. It's what makes corn in areas under drought-stress look like Hawaiian pineapple fields.

People can't curl themselves up tightly to resist the heat. Instead whole populations stampede en-mass to snatch up air conditioners. Room-size air conditioning units at local retailers are reportedly as available this mid-July as snow shovels and sale were in February.

While we scrounged along with the rest of the population last winter for salt to keep the milk truck from sliding downhill backwards into the dairy barn, we managed to avoid the air conditioner rush.

Our old brick farm home, surrounded by high, shading maple

trees, is a blessing that helps make that possible. So is the lone window fan we set up in an upstairs window for an hour or two before bedtime on the hottest nights, to pull in slightly cooler evening air.

Every time The Farmer sleeps in air conditioning, he pays for it the next few days with a sore throat. Besides, we're just not air-conditioning people. During the "screen season," with the house windows and doors open to the outdoors, we can keep better track of what's happening around the farm.

Like the sound of the milking system humming away at the dairy barn. Running at normal times and at normal noise level, the compressor units that can be heard at the house are reassuring that all is functioning as it should. Regular rounds of field equipment also confirm that the tractor and mower or baler are at least not "broke down" for the moment.

Screens bring to our ears the distress calls of a calving heifer or the exuberant baaing-sound a calf makes when it escapes a pen and

goes running about the farm, kicking up its heels. Hearing it is always easier than catching it.

Most of all, though, we like an open house for the sounds of nature around us. Even before day-break the birdsongs begin, as the mockingbirds taunt the rest of Mother Nature's critters for still living abed.

Eating breakfast early one recent morning, I heard the chattering of baby-chicks. Our little brown hen's nine offspring have their adult-color plumage, yet still make hatchling noises. Though I'd never seen this clan in the yard, the sound of clucking mother hen and answering babies was definitely coming from the area of the basement porch.

Which is where they were. With a whole farmstead of fields and pasture to roam, they hang out on the porch. Go figure.

Repeated, short, irate chirps - cardinal complaints - announce that the birdfeeder is empty. And the lyric, beautiful song of the tiny house wren, who solos outside the kitchen window - is suddenly silent. Is she quietly nesting?

Loud hoonking over the pond, followed by splashdown sounds, signals the return of our now-grown Canada geese family. After paddling to the pondbank, they parade, single-file, to the corn field, to graze on tender shoots.

At dusk, fat bullfrogs in the cattails announce the day's end with throaty croakings. One lingering robin answers back a good-night. And the sound of evening tranquility slips in through the windows on a gentle breeze.

Maybe we're just old fashioned. But we enjoy the screen season.



Krista Lyn Byers and Andrew Smeltz are veal representatives who promote veal throughout Pennsylvania.

Veal Ambassadors Promote Industry

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Again this summer, the PBC is working with college-age students to conduct numerous in-store cooking demonstrations and to staff exhibits which promote veal at various community events.

Krista Byers, of Perry County, and Andy Smeltz, of Dauphin County, are representatives for the veal industry at several consumer promotions throughout the state. Most recently, they staffed farm-city tours in Bradford and Tioga Counties as well as the Lancaster County farmers' market. Both individuals are students at Penn State University and possess an interest in animal agriculture.

Byers and Smeltz began their internships with a comprehensive training program which exposed them to each major step in veal production. From a personal tour

of a veal farm to on-site inspection of the processes practiced at the packing plant, the two were then instructed on the nutritional advantages of veal so that they may effectively understand and promote the product to the vast consumer market. An overview of the entire process also allows them to use first-hand experience to dispel many of the common misconceptions that consumers may have about veal.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to represent the industry and I'm eager to answer consumer's questions," said Byers. Smeltz shares equal enthusiasm in the program and adds that the face-to-face interaction with consumers will provide valuable feedback for a sharpened focus on production and marketing issues.

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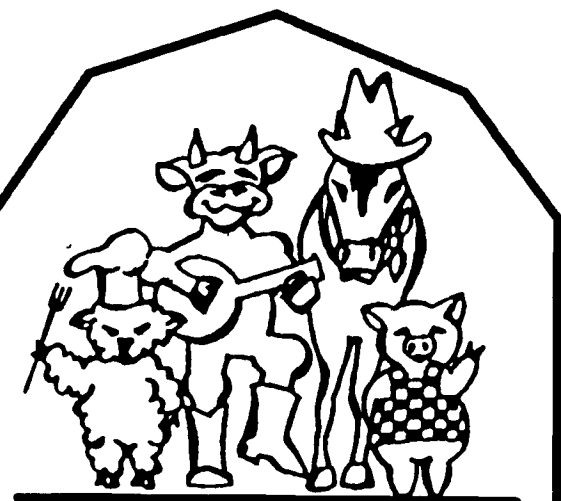
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