

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



These things have a way of starting out innocently enough. But, then, somehow they just get way out of control.

It all began about 10 years ago, in the early stages of our farm conservation plan. In the course of laying underground drainage lines to dry up surface water, our farm and household-use water supply was diverted. In order to restore and backup the underground reservoir that fed the water source, we built a small pond.

Over the course of the years, The Farmer has added a couple of special fish to this small body of water, where we often rest and enjoy a snack on the little pier when barn chores are finished at dusk.

Had anyone ever suggested we'd name farm pond fish, I'd have figured they were short a few scales. Nevertheless, soon after the four koi - colorful, large-growing, Japanese goldfish - were installed in their new underwater home, each had established its own identity. Related to carp, koi are algae-eaters with vacuum-cleaner-like mouths - and appetites. Their assignment: to keep the pond free of yucky-looking algae growth.

Whitey was originally the largest and tamest, a chubby, mostly-white, fish accented with a few yellow and black spots. Palomino's neon-gold coloration is highlighted by splotches of pure white. The soft-pinkish koi with

marbled-markings of white, gray and black shades was dubbed Marble. Most reclusive - then and now - is Tiger, who rarely shows his fat, fishy body of bright orange and black markings.

A couple of household goldfish were added to the pond population two years ago by a young friend cleaning out his aquarium when he left for college. Occasionally we would see the little goldfish as we fed the koi, so we knew they were faring well and actually growing up in the plentiful-food environment of the pond.

Then, one day late last summer, The Farmer announced that he had spotted a couple of inch-long fish fry in the pond. The day I found him on the pier, field glasses in hand, trying to see if he could figure out what the tiny fry were, I knew this whole hobby was turning fishy.

We pondered the mysterious babies all winter long. When the ice finally thawed in Spring, the dark-gray-colored hatchlings had grown to three-inch size. And they regularly came to snatch their share of crumbs from the koi's food, unafraid of the oversize goldfish a small friend has since described as "a hunnerd' feet long!"

"We have four baby gold-

colored fish," announced the Farmer with a grin one April day. Within a few more days, there were six, then eight, then a dozen small gold-colored fish. And it became apparent that many of the rest were also changing color from drag gray to neon, while also growing at about the rate of an inch a month.

Eventually, we concluded that the pond had been abundantly blessed with offspring from the donor goldfish. Algae-eaters like the koi, these now many-dozen goldfish have completely cleared the pond's early-summer epidemic of thick algae growth. You could actually hear soft slurping sounds as they gorged themselves

on the gummy, floating greenery, gathering nutrients that grew many of them into six-inchers in a matter of a few months. And the speedy, scrappy mob of goldfish outrabs our four, slow, fat koi at feeding time.

Frankly, we're not quite sure where this unplanned, unexpected aquaculture development is headed. Especially since a second hatch has swelled the swirling school of goldfish with more hatchlings, some already golden colored.

Some cutting-edge marketing specialist could probably use this resource to put a whole new twist to the phrase "golden fried fish fillets".....



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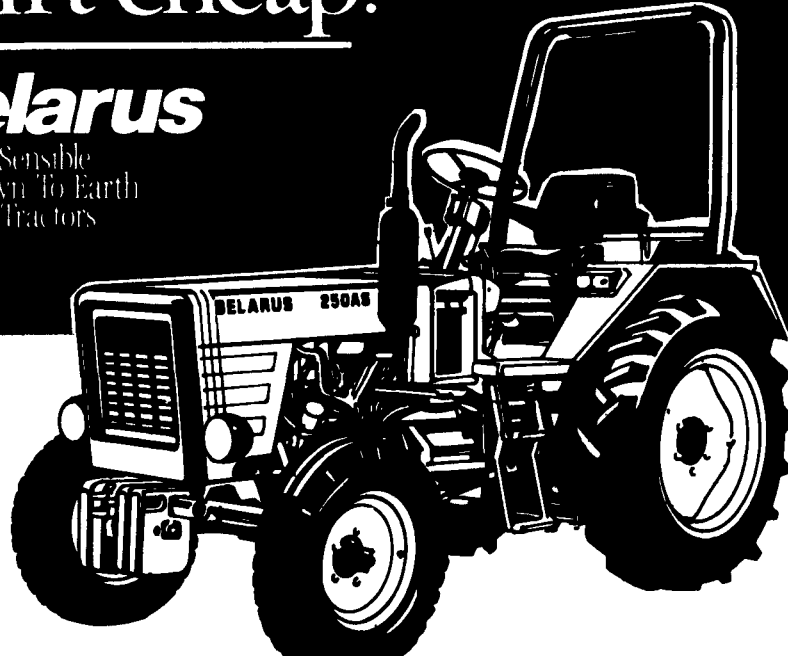
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