

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Progress and production across the state go into a sort of temporary limbo this week as the state's most important season gets under way.

Harvest season. Harvest season, that is, for Pennsylvania's most well-known and widely-hunted big-game animal: the whitetail deer.

Opening day of "deer season" has always been one of the state's biggest holidays, ushering in a

period of economic boon to those more wilderness areas of our Commonwealth where large concentrations of hunters converge. Friends from other states where deer hunting is pursued with slightly less-fervent buck fever always raise their eyebrows in surprise to learn that even many of our schools close for at least one day of observation.

Something like a million hunters usually head for the hills on open-

ing day. That means miles of rugged mountain foot travel for many and more leisurely spying from the edge of a meadow woodlot or open fields for others. Not to mention those few hapless antler-pursuers who will spend some hours trudging in circles somewhere lost in mountaintop fog.

A million hunters equates to multi-millions of manhours of pre-hunt preparation. Hours spent gathering the boots and the gloves, the downfilled coats and the battery-charged handwarmers. Hours sighting in the rifles, stocking up on the ammunition, and accounting for details like a drag rope, blaze orange hat and change for the phone at the little general store to call home to explain how the buck got away and why it's necessary to stay at camp an extra day. (Or double checking that you have your phone credit card.)

Like all harvest crews, hunters may travel on their feet, but are fueled from their stomachs. Legendary are the tales of accomplished camp cooks, who send packs of hunters off into the early

morning mountain darkness stuffed with stacks of pancakes, slabs of ham and bacon, gallons of hot coffee. At the end of the day, tables groaning with turkey or beef feasts and all the trimmings welcome them back, to rest weary legs and rehash the day's hunt.

The hunting "fuel" that's not talked about are the empty-calorie rations (junk food?) that most hunters haul along. I recall, as a kid, raiding Dad's leftover hunting foodstocks for goodies that survived the trip. And on those scattered years when The Farmer could slip away for a day or two, shirt-pocket residue and pickup truck litter provided obvious clues.

That such rations are among the most basic of hunting supplies was reinforced by statistical marketing data accumulated by our eldest during the few months she worked at a local convenience store. After everything else had been accumulated, hunters headed

North made one final stop to round out their supplies of three basic necessities of mountain life: bottled propane gas, potato chips, and candy.

A cash register receipt I removed from the pickup after The Farmer returned from a single day of deer hunting a year ago further confirmed this data. Listed on the telltale slip of paper were purchases of soft drinks, potato chips, candy bars and a giant bag of M & M's.

More recently, after The Farmer's one day away for bowhunting, I again opened the pickup and found an empty M & M's bag tossed atop the stack of boots and insulated gear.

No wonder they return home lamenting the bucks that never showed or that vanished in the distance, teasing with just a mere glimpse of a bouncing white tail. The sound of all that crackling candy wrapping is a dead giveaway.

Extension Agent Has 25 Years

DAUPHIN (Dauphin Co.) — James E. Welshans, agriculture agent in Dauphin County, has been an extension educator in a variety of settings in his 25 years.

With the encouragement of the Clinton county agent, Welshans began his extension career with a two-month stint as 4-H summer assistant in Northumberland County, then moved to Clearfield County, where he spent the next 15 years working with 4-H youth and expanding into horticulture. In 1984 he transferred to Dauphin County to become the county extension director with program responsibilities in horticulture. Along the way he earned a master's in agriculture and extension education at Penn State.

On two occasions, Welshans taught extension education methods as part of the college programs in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. In 1994, after 10 years of heavy administrative duties, Welshans elected to return to full-time horticulture program work where he looks forward to expanding his program in urban horticulture and commercial vegetable production as well as developing an educational program for professionals who manage turf to create a safe environment in municipal parks and athletic fields.

Welshans said the thing he likes best about extension work is that

every day is different, it is never the same. In commenting on the changes he has observed in the past 25 years, Welshans is amazed at evolving science and technology. Many of the basics he learned about plants as an undergraduate at Morehead State University have become obsolete as research and knowledge have increased.

Given the chance, he would choose the same work again because it has provided him with so many interesting opportunities such as the travel and work in Africa. "Some of my best friends work in extension. We help each other, they understand and it goes both ways. It's really neat," said Welshans. His greatest satisfactions have come as he helped new staff to develop into successful agents. Welshans' leadership and program excellence were recognized in 1993 when he received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents. He served as President of the Pennsylvania Association of County Agricultural Agents 1993.

Jim and Jane, his wife of 27 years, live in Hummelstown. Sons Jeff and Joel are Penn State graduates. Daughter Jennifer is a freshman at Penn State majoring in agriculture business. For relaxation, Jim likes to work outside on his lawn and garden.

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