

**On Being a
Farm Wife
(and other
hazards)
Joyce Bupp**



"C'mon giirrls! Time to get it in gear!"

A few of our dairy herd girls are actually already "in gear." Low gear.

They wait patiently on the far side of the gate that closes off the rear entrance to the dairy barn, basking in the sunshine and flipping their tails at a few early season flies.

Bonnie will be first in line, waiting to push her way around the gate the moment it begins to swing open for the cows to enter and find their stalls for afternoon milking. Three-year-old Bonnie has more the personality of a beagle than a bovine, a cuddly lap-pet if she didn't weigh 1,200 pounds.

Close behind will be aging Amy, the lone remaining animal in the herd from the kids' 4-H showing years. Typical of 4-H cow pets, Amy is likewise gentle, patient, and unflappable.

And behind them will come Pansy, another matron of the herd who ambles her way to the most distant corner of the barn and nibbles at some neighbors' feed before settling down in her own spot. Pansy has one maddening quirk. Her sharp-shooter tail rarely misses hitting the target of your face.

But while these three are usually operating in low gear by the time we head out to put the herd in for the afternoon, the rest of the cows

will still be in neutral. Motionless, save for the cud-chewing jaws and twitching tails, they lounge around the exercise lot and enjoy the edge-of-woods shade.

At the first call, a quarter or so of the herd will slowly rise to their feet, stretch with arching backs and begin the plodding gait toward the barn. On rare days, the entire herd will rise and come at the call. More often, a handful of the cows will simply pretend not to notice nor see the herder headed out in their direction. Only when the herder has come within 20 feet or so of their resting spots will the slowpokes reluctantly make the effort to rise.

"Me? You want me?" they seem to ask with puzzled expressions. As if we didn't do this every single day of the year.

Gina brought up the tail end of the trek to the barn a few days ago, as I rounded up the girls one warm, sunny afternoon. "Tail end" is probably a poor choice of terms to use on Gina. She was born with only a stubby, half-length tail, with the traditional switch on it. During summertime, when the bugs get the most pesty,

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.)—Leaving grass clippings on the lawn will not harm your turf—in fact, it may be beneficial, says a Penn State turfgrass expert.

"It's estimated that 20 percent of what goes into landfills is yard debris such as leaves, hedge prunings and grass clippings," says Dr. Peter Landschoot, Penn State

we always feel sorry for Gina with her mini-sized flyswatter.

Often the tail-ender will be Margaret, a tall, black heifer with a tendency to "do her own thing." While all the other cows are filling into the barn around the half-opened gate, Margaret will meander off in the opposite direction toward the bunk feeder. That entails making a separate side-trip to round her up, usually on an afternoon when you've gotten a late start anyway.

One recent evening after milking, I walked back into the barn to come face-to-face with Margaret, wandering around, sampling feed, having slipped out of her tie string. Slowly, I walked Margaret back to her stall; instead of stepping in, she just kept going. I gave up and walked out until other help was available; we could have gone back and forth for an hour.

Sometimes it takes a while to get Margaret out of neutral. Usually, she's in reverse.

And on occasion, she slips out of park.

assistant professor of turfgrass science. "Recycling grass clippings not only is civic-minded, but it also can be beneficial to the lawn and saves the work involved in bagging.

"If you leave the clippings on the lawn, you can reduce fertilizer needs by as much as one-third. When turf is mowed on a regular basis, clippings break down easily, returning nitrogen and other nutrients to the soil.

"Some people are concerned that returning clippings to the lawn may result in thatch accumulation," says Landschoot. "But because the clippings decompose rapidly, they do not contribute to thatch."

For clippings to break down rapidly, the lawn must be mowed frequently enough so that large amounts of leaf residue don't remain on the surface of the turf. "Weekly mowing often isn't frequent enough, especially during the peak period of leaf growth in spring," he says. Excessive accumulations of clippings remain on the surface for long periods and can smother the grass.

"When you're mowing, you shouldn't take off more than one-third of the leaf blade at one time. Otherwise, you may scalp the grass and make it more vulnerable to stress."

If no herbicides have been applied to the grass, homeowners can rake the dried clippings and use them as mulch around trees, shrubs or flowers, says Landschoot.

Lawn mower manufacturers now offer mulching mowers that keep the clippings circulating under the mower deck, chopping the grass blades into finer pieces. "This hastens the decomposition of the clippings and reduces the amount of residue left on the lawn," says Landschoot.

"However, you don't have to buy a mulching mower to recycle clippings. Ordinary lawn mowers also will provide good results."

Grass clippings also can be composted. "If you combine clippings with tree leaves, the two sources of yard waste will complement one another in the composting process," Landschoot says.

Leave Grass Clippings On Lawn

Dairy Volunteer Needed

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — The Adams County Holstein Club needs a volunteer to chair the Ice Cream Extravaganza to be held

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