

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Spotlessly clean heifers and cows stand in wooden-stalled shelters, buried up to their bellies in deep piles of golden straw. In front of them are piles of leafy, green hay.

One old cow, a veteran at this scene, yanks a mighty mouthful of the lush dry forage, then tosses her head to scatter bits of the hay across her shining, sleekly-

groomed back. Then, with a sigh, she settles her shining flanks onto the thick, fluffy bed of straw, landing one leg right smack in a small, fresh, pile of manure somehow missed on the last trip through with the fork.

Meanwhile, at the nearby washrack, a leggy, beautifully-muscled steer bellows a loud protest at his owner's plentiful use of livestock soap and a pressure hose. When the hose hits his face, carefully aimed away from his ears, the steer grimaces with the look of grubby little kid whose mom has cornered him with a washrag.

And, in still other barns, thick-fleeced sheep stand patiently on trimming tables, while owners fit and shape their curly coats. Over the scene echoes the loud squeal of a pig, squeaky clean from a scrubbing. Having escaped from the bath, the pig has found a bag of feed and despite his owner's best efforts to corral him, is gobbling up chop like...well, like a hog.

All over the state, all over the country, similar scenes are taking place. As summer begins to wane and harvest season looms ahead, local and regional livestock shows and fair take center stage in rural communities.

Fairs and shows have always been a proud rural tradition, a chance to showcase agriculture's best in the locale. Friendly competition and visiting with neighbors and fellow exhibitors is the people-side of shows and fairs that make them so much fun. And, if a little prize money is won to boot, to help defray the costs of hauling and being away, that's a bonus. For many of us, it was never profitable—just a fun hobby.

Shows offer one of the greatest learning avenues for kids that are involved. They're fun vacations: you get to spray each other with

wash hoses, eat fair junk food, and sleep in your dirty clothes on a pile of hay. Where else would Mom let you get away with that?

Meanwhile, kids learn to finish a job, take responsibility for themselves and their animals, practice sportsmanship and develop physical and "people" skills that will stay with them for a lifetime. And millions of college educations and

the start-ups of businesses have been partially financed with winnings from livestock showing.

But, over the years, many of us adults involved with shows have grown concerned over the heavy emphasis on winning that sometimes prevails. Too often, that emphasis is underlined by overzealous, parental involvement.

A great, great majority of parents of youth exhibitors are supportive, encouraging, enthusiastic, helpful and maintain their good humor through the show season. There are, unfortunately, a tiny fraction of parents who want to see their kids win—almost at any cost.

The zeal to win—at whatever cost—was underlined at a mid-west livestock show a year or two ago, when tampering with animals caused some youth exhibitors to forfeit many thousands of dollars in championship winnings. One wonders—were their parents

looking the other way? Or helping?

We've stood on both the top and the bottom of cattle classes.

The top's more fun. But not if you have to cheat to get there.

What's your k.d.-learning in the showing this year?

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The Hershey Gardens was de-

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The gardens are open daily through October 31, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Admission rates are \$4.25 adults (ages 16-61); \$3.75 seniors (62 and up); \$2 youth (3-15). Family and group rates are available. For further information, please call (717) 534-3492.

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