

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



Bits of corn silage litter the floor, natural confetti in shades of beige, green and golden yellow.

This precious feedstuff also decorates the porches and lies thick along the roadside. Every time the forage chopper and chuck wagons pass, they drop bits that have clung to their metal parts during the harvesting process. Breezes toss it, passing cars swirl it and tracking feet drag it all over the place.

But the stuff in the house is not from passing wagons or from cars. It's dropped, sneakily and steadily, from passing pants cuffs. Shoes. And pockets.

Pockets are among the neatest of inventions. Likely they were devised by one of our early, ancestral farmers who needed to lug around a pocketknife and couple of fence insulators and creatively devised a pocket/pouch in

his animal-skin garment.

And life for farm wives hasn't been the same since.

Besides their obvious practicality for holding things, pockets make some jobs much more interesting. Like laundry.

Despite those perky ladies on the television commercials whose life seems to center on having the brightest, whitest clothes, laundry is actually pretty boring. Most of us are just happy if we can see what color their T-shirts are when we're finished — if you can find color between the three-cornered rips, the tiny welding-spark holes and the giant blots of lube oil and hydraulic fluid.

But pockets add that exciting element of surprise.

One of the items falling more frequently out of laundered pockets in this household are small, tubular bits of sponge. Ear plugs.

The Farmer II has been wearing ear plugs for work around equipment for several years now, much to my satisfaction. Hopefully he will be spared the equipment-roar deafness that afflicts many farmers after years of frequent exposure to high-decibel farm machine noise.

No matter how flattened and misshaped those little sponge capsules become under the weight of a load of damp jeans, they bounce back into their original form after a short time and are ready for re-use. Plus, they're clean again.

More plentiful than ear plugs is the predictable farmer hardware. Fence staples, cow ear tags, assorted nuts, bolts, nails, washers and miscellaneous metal fix-it stuff are routine residue. This assorted lost-and-found, after it has been washed, rinsed and spun a couple of times, accumulates in a clean, empty yogurt container on the dryer and is eventually shuffled back toward the shop.

Next to the recycled hardware is often a scattering of auction weight slips or parts delivery slips retrieved from pockets before they meet a watery demise. Though attempts are made to empty pockets of paper prior to their journey through would-be cleanliness, sometimes the job gets only half-done. Or not done. Then we have the extra added attraction of dark laundry speckled with soggy crumbs of bills or forgotten paper tissues left in pockets. Wallet fall-out. (Not usually money!) Or shiny

candy-bar papers. Empty, always, doggone it.

A few days ago, a different pocket problem turned up. Headed out for an evening walk, I stuffed a few dog biscuits in my pocket for the furry, white "grand-dog." When I reached into that pocket to

retrieve them, one was missing. Poking a bit deeper, my finger went straight through the gaping hole in the pocket's bottom seam.

No one can ever justifiably accuse me of having "deep pockets."

But I can brag to my golfing brother that I got a hole in one.

## Some Elders Escape Poverty

Washington, D.C. — Elderly poor people do not always remain destitute. A surprising number rise above the poverty line, even if only a notch or two.

"Our analysis of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) for 1968-88 corroborates other studies showing considerable movement out of poverty among all poor elders," says Dr. Leif Jensen, associate professor of rural sociology in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"According to our sample, almost 40 percent break out of poverty after spending one year in poverty," notes Dr. Diane K. McLaughlin, deputy director of Population Research Institute. "However, their modest increases in total annual income and level of income-to-needs suggests that many of these elderly have moved only slightly above the poverty line."

Jensen and McLaughlin are co-authors of the paper, "Do Poor Elderly Ever Really Leave Poverty?" presented August 20 at a joint session of the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and the Rural Sociological Society in Washington, D.C.

"Among people aged 65 or more, the prevalence of poverty and the probability of becoming poor are higher for rural than urban elderly, and they increase substantially with age, due to widowhood,

disability and exiting the labor force," Jensen says.

"At the same time, however, there is also significant movement out of poverty among the elderly."

The Penn State researchers used the PSID data in determining what percentage of elderly poor were able to move above the poverty line after one year and over a period of time.

The original PSID study sample of 5,000 families included a subset of 2,000 low-income families.

"Of the sample group of 738 rural elderly who were poor for one year, 277 or 37.5 percent had escaped poverty after that first year," McLaughlin says.

The corresponding exit rate for urban elderly was slightly higher at 39.4 percent.

"We also learned that the rate at which poor elderly escaped from poverty is almost directly proportional to the number of years they had spent in poverty," Jensen says. "The more deeply entrenched the poverty, the less likely is the chance of exiting that poverty."

For rural elderly living in poverty between 11 and 20 years, the annual rate of transition out of poverty was only 5.7 percent (7 out of 123).

Without considering number of years in poverty, 22.2 percent of poor rural elders exited poverty in a given year, compared to 25.4 percent of their urban counterparts, McLaughlin says.



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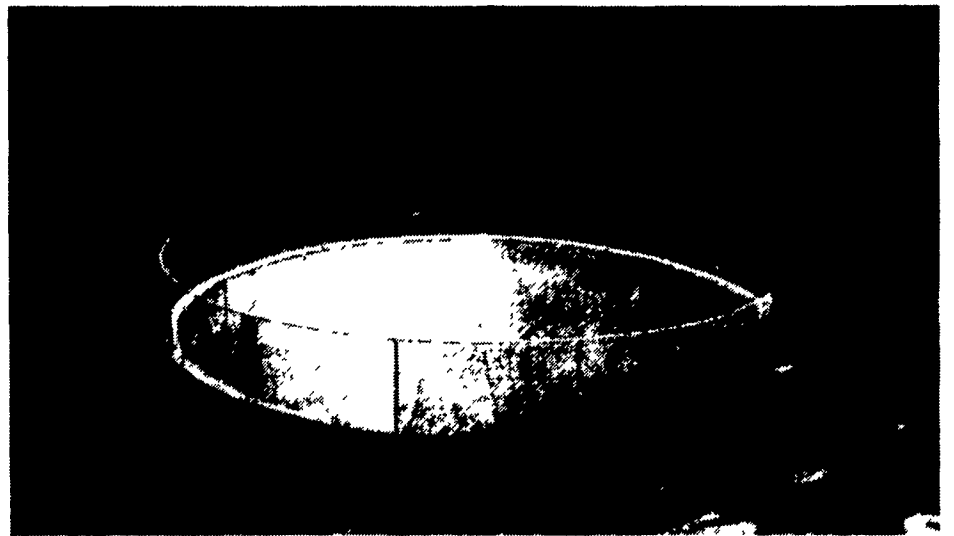
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