

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

Just look at this floor. You'd think a few of the cows have been detouring through the kitchen on their way to the barn or that we have a dozen kids tracking in and out of this house. We have muddy tracks. We have bits of hay and straw. We have assorted sizes of gravel. We have tiny bits of paper, a random pin or two, several pieces of cat food (guess which kid did that). Assorted dust balls, miscellaneous dirt and mushy dark bits which — without even checking — will assuredly carry the same scent as the

scrapings from the feedlot. And I just ran the vacuum cleaner a day or so ago. "I don't know where all this dirt comes from," I grumbled to The Farmer in passing, as I steered toward the door, herding a couple handfuls of the daily floor accumulation toward the outside with the broom. He offered a true dirt-farmer explanation: "It's called topsoil retention." Now, he has always been a firm believer in soil conservation. And, like many of our neighbors, we

have installed numerous improvement practices in cooperation, with soil conservation agencies. There are terraces and grassed waterways engineered into our sloping hillsides. The fields curve around those hillsides in contour-style planting, to hold the soil and slow runoff. We practice minimum and no-tillage for much of our crops plantings, keep a regular crops rotation program and apply manure, fertilizer, and lime as much as possible in accordance with soil samples. A fishpone is now located where our son's hogs once wallowed in hog heaven along a small portion of the creek just below the springhouse. The stream exits it for another hundred yards or so underground through the meadow below, to allow for equipment access to feeding areas behind the barns without tearing up the sod. A wide, long, stoned waterway slows runoff from the Interstate, runoff that once ripped through the meadow and left long gouges behind in the soil, growing deeper with each heavy storm. And a

spring site improvement, which diverts a pasture spring watering source into a drinking trough and fences off the cattle's former access to the ground source of the water, is nearly finished. Farmers believe in conservation. Farmers believe in retaining topsoil. But on the kitchen floor? I don't remember seeing that spelled out in any of the conservation management plans I've ever seen. But, gee, it's a heck of an excuse for a dirty floor. "Please don't pay any attention to the dirt you see about my kitchen floor," we farm wives could assure guests, with a look of complete sincerity. "It's a new topsoil retention program we're experimenting with in conjunction, we practice minimum-sweeping, to help hold down dust fallout through the rest of the house."

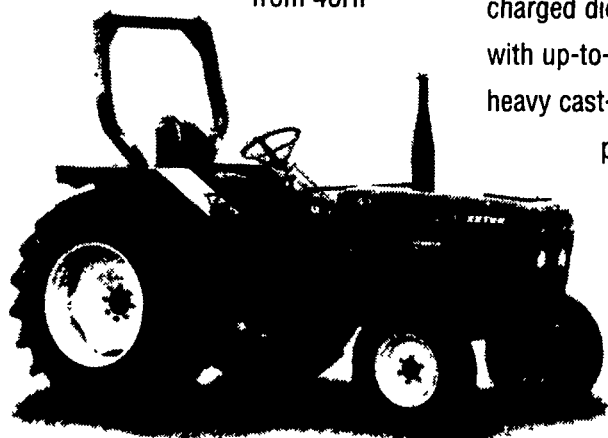
Twenty years of wear and tear on our wood-pattern, inlaid linoleum flooring has shredded the most heavily used pathways and demands replacement. The pattern has camouflaged the "topsoil" very well over the years, and I'd like to reinstall the same thing. Except that it is no longer available. Whites, lights, and plain dark colors are out of the question, since they'll just showcase the daily accumulation of droppings. So, when I start dumping samples of kitchen floor sweepings on potential patterns to assess how well the "topsoil" fades into the pattern, it would be helpful if I could explain to the floor covering salespeople that it's all part of an agriculture conservation management plan. Maybe the folks at Soil Conservation would consider this as a new program?

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