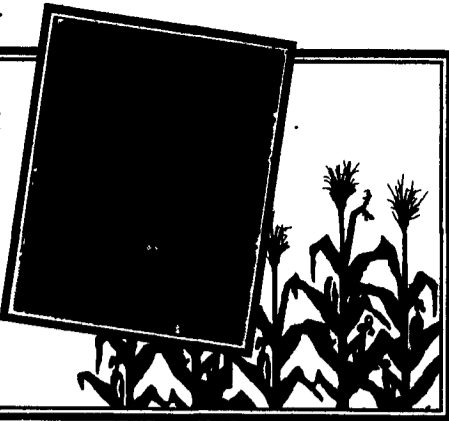


**On Being a
Farm Wife
(and other
hazards)
Joyce Bupp**



It's an unlikely scenario. Black and white figures dotting the hillsides, heads down intently, munching away at green grass. Cattle grazing? So what, you say?
We have never grazed this farm-and least not in my memory-in January. But then, how many January's in southcentral Pennsylvania have there even been when cattle could chow down fresh, growing, green grass?
Like most producers of livestock in these parts, summer's drought left us seriously short of

feedstuffs. So, as quickly as possible, we harvested the short corn crop last fall and immediately followed it with plantings of an oats-rye mixture. Intent was that these cool-tolerant grasses would thrive in early fall and provide some backup tonnage of forage to help make up the difference. Again, the weather was uncooperatively; the grass crop just didn't develop the height and volume it should have, though it did add some precious volume to the winter supplies.
Thus, with lingering temper-

ature weather and continuing, if slow, growth of the crop, we hastily strung temporary fences around almost the entire farm. And the "girls" were turned out in alternating areas to harvest grasses too short to cut with equipment. Though they only enjoy the stay outside for an hour or two each day, even that has helped fill their ever-hungry, four-stomach interiors and somewhat reduce the daily inroads into our skimpy stores of feed.
And, the girls love it.
But setting them loose across the farm has it's interesting moments, since cows turned out on new turf behave like a group of exuberant kindergartners on a new playground. The week of wintery stuff over the holidays interrupted their daily recess it's hard to graze snow and kept them confined to the feeding and exercise lots. So when last week's stretch of April-like weather arrived, they practically knocked the fences down to hit the grassy slopes.
Like baby calves their first

time out of the pen, those mature, milking bovines jump, run, kick up their heels and butt one another. Cavoring sometimes right through our hastily-strung, temporary-grazing site fences.
And, at least the first few days on new pasture, cattle can't just go eat the waiting green grass. Instead, they must trot around to the farthest corners of the fence. See if they can go under it. Or Over. Or through. All of which ours did at some point.
Anticipating this predictable behavior, We have ridden fence-lines, cowboy style, with the three-wheeler. Our cows are accustomed to being herded with cycle-type horsepower and respond well. Since those first few days of testing the limits, the herd has settled into a routine of scattering across the hillsides, harvesting brunch, then promptly lining back up to return to the feed bunk when the feed mixer wagon goes by.

One bit of bad behavior that persists is their breaking into our fenced-off stash of round bales of hay in the center of the field below the house. Not necessarily to eat the hay. Just to play. They push and shove at the bales with their heads, butt them, rub against them, and just generally shred them, a layer at a time, until the bales are trashed. The girls know those bales are off limits, but cows are drawn to forbidden turf like steel to a magnet.
Increasing numbers of dairy products in recent years have adapted various grazing techniques, letting the cows at partly replace the mechanical methods of forage harvesting. Of course, it's still necessary to have winter stores of feed put away, so the cattle have something to eat when grasses have shriveled up and snow blankets the pastures.
We've often debated the merits of grazing. But who'd have "Thunk" we'd incorporated it into our feeding program...in January?
D'ya suppose this is a forerunner to a killing frost on Memorial Day?

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WE'RE
EVEN
BETTER.**



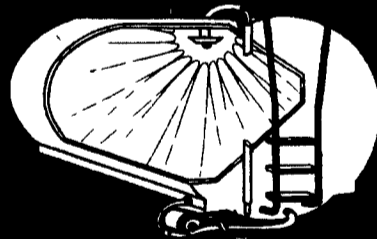
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