

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

Joyce Bupp



Knee-high by the Fourth of July.

"We have a question," queried a trio of neighborhood friends who routinely take their exercise power walks on the stretch of township road that loops through the middle of the farm.

"That saying about corn being knee-high by the Fourth of July?" one continued.

"Whose knee?"

We all chuckled together—and I confessed to having no clue whose knee the saying referred to. But pondering their teasing later brought to mind a memory.

July Fourth one year ago, corn wasn't knee high to anything. Except maybe a grasshopper. We eyed the drying, stunted fields of corn with growing dread. The rains hadn't come.

And, didn't, as we all remember. And area farmers with livestock and/or poultry to feed and bed have paid the price in scrounging for costly replacements.

What a difference a year makes. This Independence Day celebration finds us not checking for cactus growing in the backforty, but scanning to see of the racket in our backyard rainforest is a group of monkeys taking over the maples. Which turned out to be just the resident family of fat, irate squirrels grumbling at Butch the Tiger Cat, who has recently claimed dibs on the bird feeder for his catnaps.

As we celebrate our nation's birthday this weekend—a nation founded, defended and won pretty much by a rag-tag army of untrained farmers—there is much for which we can be thankful. Three things especially come to my mind on this 1998 national birthday celebration.

Freedom. Family. Frequent rains.

And who but a farmer would delight in a rainy holiday weekend?

A cornfield grows directly across the road from the farmhouse-office door. It was our first planted when the early May monsoons stopped and the first wave of Sahara heat swept across southern York County.

Few things delight farmers more than watching things grow. But the growth of that field was ploddingly slow at first, it's initial race out of the seed and up into springtime stymied by goofy weather. Then, once germinated and poking through the soil, the early growth looked sort of a pale, yellowish color. Remember the chilly nights in late May when we tossed another blanket on the beds?

Recent greenhouse conditions and the booster feeding of liquid nitrogen fertilizer have since coaxed the cornstalks into a spiraling growth that is an absolute delight to watch. The field across the road is shooting corn growth up on a couple of inches a day has obliterated the view of our neighbors on the ridge above the farm.

And while our early summer combination of abundant moisture, plentiful heat and choking humidity are the most miserable kind of weather to us people-types, the crops that sustain our livelihood thrive in those conditions. No, it's not favorable for cows or pigs or chickens but absolutely loved by corn, soybeans, and hay.

So, everytime I begin moaning about the bouts of heat and humidity, I try to jolt my conscience with memory-minders about last year's lack of green.



4-H HAPPENINGS

Gloucester County 4-H Fair

For the first time, the Gloucester County 4-H Fair will run from Thursday, July 23 through Sunday, July 26.

For all four days, the Gloucester County 4-H Fairgrounds in Mullica Hill will become a beehive of activity. Route #77 will swarm with a steady stream of vehicles bringing more than 900 4-H'ers and their exhibits to show off to more than 12,000 Fair visitors. The fair hours will be Thursday, July 23, from 4 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, July 24 and 25, from 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.; and Sunday, July 26, from 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

For the four days of the annu-

al Gloucester County 4-H, the animal barns will burst with rabbits, horses, pigs, goats, steers and cows, while the exhibit barn will show visitors 4-H woodworking, needlework, quilts, crafts, vegetables and flowers. Exhibiting marks the culmination of a full year of work for 4-H members.

An exciting schedule of events over the four days will provide something for every age group. In addition to 4-H exhibits and shows, the fair will also host both the New Jersey Peach Ffestval and the Gloucester County Tomato Expo, both of which will provide exhibits, tasting, and contests throughout the four days.

On Thursday, horse, and swine shows will be followed by the naming of the Gloucester County 4-H Ambassador Team and a performance by the Pitman Hobo Band at 8 p.m. Friday's event will include sheep, rabbit and small animal shows, a Western Horse Show, a livestock auction, and the Miss Peach Pageant Children can also enjoy a magic show and compete in a Kiddie Tractor Pull.

The Gangi dancers performance will be followed by country dance lessons. Saturday is "Kids Day." Activities for kids start with a Diaper Derby and Baby Parade followed by Turle Races and a Frog Jumping Contest. On stage, Sci Fi Robot present a children's program and 4-H Leader John Means will present a Rock-N Reptile Show. The entire family can enjoy an English Horse Show and a Draft

Horse Pull and storage, the Gloucester City Old Time String Band.

Sunday will feature a Mini Horse Show, a dairy goat show and a dog show and for good eating something new, a pig roast.

Prize 4-H market lambs and hogs will be auctioned off Friday evening, July 24 at 7:30 p.m. at the 4-H Fair.

Arrangements will be made to have your purchased animal taken to the slaughter house and packaged for your freezer, roasts, chops, bacon, even scrapple. The 4-H members who raise these animals use the money to purchase new animals for next year. Many set aside any profit they receive toward their future educational goals.

Is your preference chicken, seafood or pork? On Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 4 p.m. - 7:30 p.m., a special food will be the feature for dinner. On Thursday, you will choose from steamed clams, clams on the half shell, shrimp or barbecue ribs or all of them! Each item is priced separately. Freshly picked sweet corn, rolls, and iced tea will complete this ala carte menu.

On Friday and Saturday enjoy 4-H's delicious chicken barbeque dinner. This includes sweet corn, fresh Jersey tomatoes, rolls, iced tea, and potato chips. On Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. There will be a pig roast.

At 6 p.m. on Friday, Miss Peach for 1998 Will take the crown and the Governor's trophy will be presented for the finest quality peaches.

Because everything—everything—this summer is green.

Green is poking out of the cracks in the pavement around the buildings; we may have to mow the driveways. It's climbing over the raspberries, hanging over pond banks, threatening to obliterate the mailbox. Green is growing on the mid-pond goosenest, sending roots right down into the pond for moisture.

Green is happily thriving in the rainspout high overhead at the edge of our house roof. Green is poking out of every nook and cranny, every niche, every bare spot where an upstart weed or grassy patch can take root.

And it is beautiful.

At least for this year, we have an idea whose knee the corn will reach this Fourth of July weekend.

The Jolly Green Giant's.

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