

Sometimes, life makes no sense.

On a farm, lots of things make scents.

"I smell chicken 'poop' claimed grandson Josh last week, as Grandpa Farmer arrived in the kitchen fresh from a stint at the dairy barn and morning feeding chores. Chicken "poop" — dried and bagged — is what our 3 year-old grandson is accustomed to his dad buying for the backyard garden at their suburban Portland, Ore. home. So all animal/barnyard odors get that label.

Actually it wasn't chicken residue, but the *Eau de Cow* fragrance wafting in the air behind Grandpa Farmer as he scrounged around the kitchen for a mid-morning snack. The two farmers were headed off together on some pressing farm chore and needed food fortification for the trip.

A farm would not be a farm without the accompanying scents of crops and animal production. Some of those fragrances are pure aesthetically "country" — freshly-plowed ground, new-mown hay, a mow of shiny, new straw and the carmel-corn scent of just-opened, molasses-laced, calf feed. And, because food production without them is impossible, there are the more "earthy" scents such as animal manures and curing silages.

But, at the moment, the most pungent fragrance around the farm is one over which only Mother Nature has any control.

We first crossed paths with it one evening about two weeks ago, after lingering at the pond until dusk to feed the geese and watch the fish jump at bugs. Sitting on the pier in the falling darkness, someone spied movement a few yards away in the meadow toward the house.

"Is that a cat running over their in the grass?" was the question. Night was coming so

quickly that only a sort of dark blur was visible.

Then came another guess, based on some streaks of white mixed in with the dark moving blob of shadow, which was by then beginning to stretch into a couple of blobs.

"That almost looks like skunks."

We grabbed the kids and began trailing the blurry parade, which by then had become obvious as a family of mother and several baby skunks, number uncertain. Our trailing was kept to a considerable and safe distance, considering we had a baby and a 3-year-old in tow.

But, in moments, the largest blur made an abrupt about-face and headed back in our direction. Obviously one mother skunk was not impressed with our even long-distance interest in her fascinating, night-foraging, family. We beat a *VERY* hasty retreat, though we were still well out of range of guided-missile skunk scent.

When it comes to skunks, one can't be too careful.

Grandma made a reconnaissance to the house with kids. Grandpa and daughter snagged a flashlight to try to get a better look at the little family, but were unable to find them. Still, they had to have headed up around the barns and buildings, probably to forage for grubs around the cattle lots.

A little later, I retreated to the back porch with the phone to return a business call, enjoying the balmy night and a bit of quiet to conduct the conversation. Midway through the phone visit, The Farmer burst onto the porch at the same instant I detected the odor.

"Skunk!" we exclaimed in unison.

Again, he grabbed the flashlight, shining it about the yard and what was visible of the farmstead. Nothing.

All settled back down. But in less than five minutes, a large, shaggy, white shape came trotting under the barn nightlight — summit, the Great Pyrrness dog owned by our son.

Does she make her rounds of the farm every night? Because, we've been treated to bedtime skunk scent for several consecutive nights at the same time. And, if so, how long will it go until.....?

My offer to contribute tomatoes for an anti-skunk-scent dog bath hasn't been needed. Yet.

Mother Nature may think skunks make good scents.

But if your large, shaggy dog turns up at the back door reeking of it, skunk perfume makes no sense at all.

Operation Hat Check

Staff from the Southcentral District of the Pennsylvania Department of Health will conduct "Operation Hat Check" at the Antique Machinery and Tractor show to be held by the Gratz Area Antique Machinery Association, Inc. at the Gratz Fairgrounds on Saturday, July 18.

"Operation Hat Check" is part of the Department of

Health's educational campaign targeted to the public, particularly farmers and those who work outdoors, about skin cancer and sun protection.

Protective hats, sunscreen, lip balm, and skin cancer fact sheets will be given out to those attending.

For more information, contact the Southcentral District office at (717) 787-8092.



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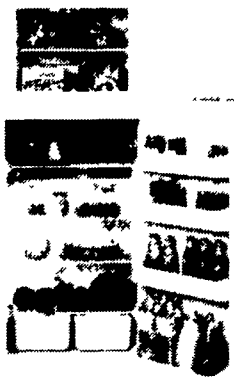
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