

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



It becomes a matter of local pride.

"How's the winter been in your part of the country?"

So we reach for the extremes in a sort of "braggin' rights" contest about our weather endurance.

"Well, it was seven degrees when I left home early yesterday morning," I reply to that question put to me at a dairy meeting last week.

Seven degrees might win you braggin' rights if you're visiting with other locals or friends whose

stomping grounds are more to the south.

But when you give that answer to fellow dairy producers from places like Minnesota or the Dakotas or Colorado, don't expect much sympathy. Indeed, they blow away any self-pity we Mid-Atlantic-located types might harbor over enduring single digit temperatures by recounting a string of temperatures in the sub-zero-category, complete with those ominous wind-chills of minus-30, minus-40, minus-50.

Not that another 10 degrees make much difference at that point.

And emphasize the difference with tales of plugging in their tractors overnight so the motors wake up in the morning. And of burying water pipes to the barn 12 feet deep in the ground so they don't freeze.

Makes farming in southcentral Pennsylvania sound almost like a vacation in the Bahamas.

While 4:30 a.m. temperatures the likes of seven degrees or thereabouts sound pretty pioneering, that kind of Big Chill is hard to beat as a shock treatment for drowsy eyes that don't quite want to open and brain still foggy with sleep. Shivering our way to the barn, we try to remind ourselves that, for goodness' sake, it IS January and cold weather is the norm, rather than the exception.

Wondering all the while why anyone would even consider living in Alaska.

In reality, cold (within reason) is welcomed here on the farm because of its deterrent effect on the

populations of some pest plants and pest insects.

Cold is necessary for the natural cycle of hibernation and hatching of some species, breaking dormancy in certain seed species. Cold is necessary in the cycle of blooming of tulips, daffodils, and other bulbs of beauty we will enjoy before all that long.

Cold gets rid of flies. At least temporarily. Since ordinary houseflies, an ongoing affliction of any place where animals and people exist, bug me, that's a personal benefit of winter.

Without cold, there would be no snow. No glittering ice. No whimsical paintings by Jack Frost on our windows.

No snowmen, no sledding, no ice skating, no skiing. No puffy, fluffy drifts against dark pine trees. No cottony tufts icing fence posts and electric poles. No swirling, curvaceous drifts piling up around house corners and banks.

Think how boring that would get, just days and days of warmth,

and gentle breezes, and green grass . . . and hey, you, stop packing your bags!

Without cold, we would still be mowing our lawns and feeling pressured to keep the weeds pulled.

Without cold, there would be no justification to own those snow blowers or snowmobiles or plows for our lawn tractors or 4 x 4 sport utility vehicles.

Without cold, all those thermal underwear, wool sweater, insulated coverall, earmuff, boot and mitten manufacturers might be forced out of work while we spent our days hanging out instead in shorts and T-shirts. Think what that might do to the economy.

Without cold, those cups of hot chocolate laced with marshmallows would be considered a fattening extravagance instead of a healthful anti-freeze for the body and cozy lift for the soul.

Without cold, spring wouldn't be nearly as much appreciated.

I'll recite that mantra to myself the next time I'm on my way to the barn dressed in seven layers of clothes at 4:30 a.m. when the thermometer reads 7 degrees.

And hope it has a warming effect.

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