

On Being a Farm Wife (and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Marketing specialists call it "value added."

That's taking a basic commodity-type product or service and enhancing it in some way which increases its desirability to some other person or entity.

Or, in other words, more saleable — worth more bucks — than it was to start with.

Like ready-to-serve chocolate milk, for instance. Sliced, diced, and somewhat-pre-cooked frozen French fries. Pre-patted hamburgers. Already baked bread, cookies and pies. Pre-cut, pre-arranged, fresh flowers.

Those are all value-added goods we've taken for granted for years. Stores are full of such items that have been enhanced to make them more useful, more attractive, more time-saving.

I'm in awe — in envy, if you will — of what the retailing business comes out with in value-added year after year. Some of it in the "now why didn't I think of that?" category. Other more along the lines of "do we really need this?"

Hustling through the produce section of a local supermarket a few weeks ago, intent on grabbing lettuce, celery and hightailing it to the register, I was stopped dead in my tracks by a new product. Packaged in a fancy plastic "squirt" bottle, like the ones containing tub-n-tile-type cleaners, the label proclaimed it to be a fruit and vegetable "washing" product.

What washing a produce washing liquid was intriguing enough that I paused to pick up

one and read the label. In addition to water, it contained some sort of citric acid product (lemon juice, maybe?) and a few other minor, relatively innocuous ingredients. Within a day or so, a coupon showed up in the mail for a similar product, this one including vinegar.

Uhhh, whatever happened to good ole' water and soap? And who decided those weren't good enough for getting apples and celery clean?

Why, the "value added" marketers, that's who.

On the heels of that mystifying and amusing find came a flyer in the mail from one of my favorite craft franchise stores. While I have little time to do "crafts," those stores stir my imagination with ideas of wonderful things to do with my spare time. Someday.

One of the specials advertised, along with other seasonal items, was for straw bales.

"Straw bale" announced the flyer, in 1/4-inch, dark black letters, followed by the price in 1/4-inch black letters... "\$8.99."

To this farmer, that sounded a bit pricey for a bale of straw, which we generally sell to neighbors wanting to seed lawn, or cover strawberries, or bed their dog boxes, or shoot archery, for a couple of bucks. What really blew my mind was the — literally

The Great Debate: Genetically Engineered Foods

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — With the promise of curing Cystic Fibrosis, the advent of weed-free crops, demand for tomatoes with brilliant red color and a shelf life of weeks and a host of health and moral questions Chester County homemakers, supermarkets, medical industries and farmers have burst into the 21st century.

Chester County Cooperative Extension, a part of Penn State dedicated to serving the community at large, has assembled a panel of scientific experts that represent some radically different view points to address developments in the field of genetically engineered plants.

The debate will be held Nov. 9, at the Italian Social Club, West Chester. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Dinner is 7 p.m.

Questions may only be submitted in advance by attending

press and ticket holders. The deadline for submitting questions and purchasing tickets is Nov. 1. Ticket price is \$20 per person.

Questions with ticket holders name must be sent to Chester County Cooperative Extension: via e-mail at ChesterExt@psu.edu; fax (610) 696-4831; or mail: 601 Westtown Road, Suite 370, P.O. Box 2747, West Chester, PA 19380-0990. For more information about Chester County Cooperative Extension and Penn State, visit us at the web address: <http://chester.extension.psu.edu/>. Click on the annual meeting, Great Debate button for a complete agenda and ticket ordering form. If you don't have access to the internet, simple call (610) 696-3500. Space is limited and tickets will be sold on a first paid basis.

— fine print. Those straw bales were 9-inches by 9-inches by 18-inches.

\$8.99! For a baby straw bale? Now THAT'S value added.

Deciding that it was time to get into the value-added business, our grandsons trekked to the fields to gather a batch of cornstalks which The Farmer had run down on field corners as he chopped silage. Using recycled bale strings, — and some help from their mother — they tied stalks into decorative corn shocks, set them up on a busy corner of our rural residential neighborhood with a "For Sale" sign, in a marketing ventured geared to generating a few dollars spending-money for these fledgling capitalists.

The corn shocks sold. Bags of salvaged ear corn packaged up

for squirrel-feed sold. Even a pumpkin, set there for decoration with no price tag...sold.

I'm debating crawling up into the straw mow and typing together neat little clusters of the plentiful mounds of loose straw resulting from mice chewing off the bale strings. Even at \$5 each, maybe I could undercut the baby-bale competition and still turn a tidy profit on my own value-added venture.

Even as I write this, a coupon has arrived for yet another product promoting itself as a "natural" produce cleaner. This one is for a dry powder in a plastic shaker container. It contains...baking soda.

In our current consumer environment, where the hottest-selling beverage is water, why should I be surprised?

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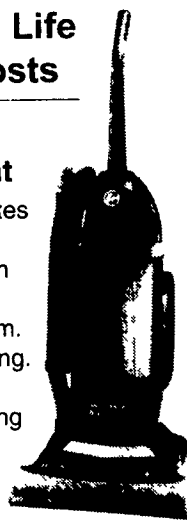
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