

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

Joyce Bupp



Time to salute a new year. Time to turn a chapter, start anew, resolve to clean up our act. Time to clean up this messy desk, scattered with clippings. Clippings which keep tangling themselves in my mind, like they do among the stuff on the desk.

"Gas mileage at 20-year low," intones one reporting on our national obsession with driving vehicles the size of houses. Another laments the skyrocketing cost of home heating fuel, clipped to one printed just last week of a funds-scarce family chopping down trees in the yard to use for heat. Mingled in are blurbs on farmland preservation efforts, along with a recent one relating to preserve farmers, if we're going to preserve farmland. And a couple more report ordinance strategies aimed at preventing "corporate" (read, large) farming in numerous municipalities of the region.

Unrelated stuff? Not in my opinion. They're indicative of two lynchpin national policies which have helped grease our booming economy of the past three-plus decades. Cheap fuel. And cheap food.

So we've happily bopped along these years, driving increasing bigger, fuel-hogging vehicles to ever-larger homes located farther and farther from the urban centers where we work, shop, and do business. And we've paved over more farm fields with concrete and blacktop so we can get there and back faster.

Meanwhile, remaining farms

battle increasing economic pressure to continue producing cheap food with evermore constraints of size and regulation and taxes to help fund the growth and to battle issues raised by a population on the move into their back 40, spurred by this economy nourished by cheap fuel and cheap food.

To stay in business, remaining farmers are urged by economists to get bigger, to be more efficient, to maximize their resources, to specialize and grow, to diversify and grow. But efforts to grow their farm businesses are increasingly thwarted by the sprawl feeding from cheap fuel and cheap food, tossing roadblocks out to halt growth and size.

Farmers, frustrated with low returns from cheap food and increasing population pressures, wear out, sell out, and move out. Remaining ones responding to encouragement to get bigger for efficiency may then find themselves battling legal, regulatory and municipal strangleholds for being "corporate," or "too big."

Food production shifts farther away, where there are fewer people, fewer rules, fewer regulations. Also fewer markets, fewer processing. Which means that cheap food has to be trucked to where people are to eat it.

Requiring more and better highways. More fuel to get it to markets. More labor in a shrinking labor pool to move it.

Does this make sense? Suppose...just suppose...

someone in a position to make such decisions decided this will be the year to get serious about weaning us from cheap, imported oil. Serious enough to implement an energy policy prioritizing use of fuels from the renewable resource of farm-produced grain.

Suppose...just suppose...that such a grain-based fuel shift had a major impact on raising farm-commodity prices from their present 20-year lows. Suppose that if grain commodities became truly profitable, farmland loss would drastically slow. We might be able to get serious about preserving both farmland and the farmers who till it.

Suppose...just suppose... senior citizens might not have to face the prospect of choosing between buying fuel or buying food and medicine. A single father struggling to make ends meet to provide for his kids might not have to chop down the trees on his lawn for heat. A nervous, shaky economy would calm down. Sales for cottage-sized, 4WD, SUV's might even pick up again.

Suppose such a policy could ultimately make us independent of the squabbling sultans and sheiks of the desert oil cartel, while boosting our farm economy. Now, wouldn't that be a New Year's resolution worth making?

OK, these clippings have messed with my mind long enough. Into the trash with 'em.

We can at least start next year with a clean desk.

**Information On Housing For Elders**

ITHACA, N.Y. — As people grow older, their life styles and housing needs change. Some choose to live independently, while others may need assistance with some aspects of daily living. A new bulletin from the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service, Housing As We Grow Older, NRAES-41, provides valuable information to help older people explore different options and make decisions about their housing and personal needs.

The 46-page publication covers six major topics: choices for independent living; choices for supportive living; designing the physical environment; moving to smaller, efficient housing; community support services; and home financial decisions. Each chapter describes available options in-depth and guides people through a decision-making process. Also included is an evaluation form which lists questions

to ask when visiting supportive housing facilities.

Housing As We Grow Older is available for \$7 per copy, plus shipping and handling and sales tax. The shipping and handling charge is \$3.75 for a single copy within the continental United States. New York residents, add eight percent sales tax (calculated on both the cost of the publication and shipping and handling charges). If ordering more than one copy or if ordering from outside the U.S., please contact NRAES for shipping rates. Orders from outside the U.S. must be prepaid in U.S. funds. Major credit cards are accepted, and checks should be made payable to NRAES. For information about quantity discounts, or for a free publications catalog, contact NRAES by phone at (607) 255-7654, by fax at (607) 254-8770, or by e-mail at nraes@cornell.edu.

**KIDS GULP MORE MILK**

While youths (18 & under) represent only 24% of the population, they drink 46% of all milk consumed in the U.S.



Source: Dairy Management, Inc.

Lancaster Farming  
**Antiques Center**  
See pages B16-B19



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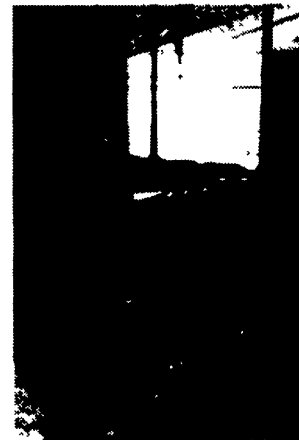
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