

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



What was that noise?
Young heifers, their bellies full from breakfast, lounged around their pen in the old bank barn,

chewing cud. A few were curled up, their heads tucked back near their tails, napping on the fresh layer of newspaper pages tossed in not long before.

A friend once dubbed our heifer-pen paper recycling the "Teach A Calf To Read" livestock literacy campaign. Standing joke is that the newspapers we toss around for the calves to lay in not only soak up lots of moisture, it gives the girls something to read in bed.

Then, that faint noise again. Voices? Muted, murmuring seemed to be coming from a back corner of the heifer pen. I looked closer. Two five-month-old heifers, Plum and Myrtle, lay close together, chewing their cud. Or so it appeared, until I listened real carefully.

"Well, look at this," said Plum,

glancing at the fresh paper under her muzzle. "More farmland is to be preserved. Boy, that always makes me happy to read about."

"Yeah, I guess so," replied Myrtle.

"You guess so?" asked Plum, with a surprised look in her big black eyes. "More land to keep for pasture? More for corn and hay? Hey, you like to eat. I know you do. Look at that haybelly on you."

"Well, thanks for the compliment!" huffed Myrtle, flipping her white ears front with irritation. "Then explain to me why I just read that, while you're going on about preserving farmland, some of the same places are making rules against big farms. How big is a 'big' farm, anyway?"

"Search me," puzzled Plum. "I guess one bigger than ours. Lemme' see that."

Plum stretched her neck over toward Myrtle, studying the printed sheets under Myrtle's muzzle.

"I think you're right," Plum admitted. "Wonder why that is, preserving farmland, then making rules about farms not being able to get bigger. Hey, I want my grandcalves in a couple of years to still be around this part of the country and have enough to eat. And last week I read something about how farmers will have to keep getting bigger to be efficient and stay in business. That they have to do that to compete."

"Yeah, I read that too," agreed Myrtle. "In fact, I wondered how many more mouths I was going to have to compete with at the trough."

"See, there you go again," said June. "Worrying about filling that haybelly."

"Cut that out!," retorted Myrtle, who stopped chewing her cud long enough to swing her head in June's direction. "It's just that I'll never be able to be one of those top milk producers if I don't get plenty to eat. And you and I can't have plenty to eat if there isn't enough land to grow my food, or if farmers can't expand to pay things like those taxes I keep reading are going

up, or to bring their kids into the farm business."

"I know," agreed Plum. "Our farmers aren't spring chickens anymore, you know. And I don't know what will happen to our herd family."

"Well, I also read the other day that some places are making those houses they're building all over have bigger 'lots'," Myrtle added. "Lots of what?"

"I think 'lots' are what they build the houses on," Plum explained. "You know, the area around the houses where they grow grass, even if they don't have cows."

"Oh," said Myrtle, brightening. "Pasture. Maybe those bigger 'lots' around those houses will grow hay for our grandcalves to eat if there's less farmland in a couple of years. Or maybe they'll let them graze those 'lots'."

"I doubt it," Plum shook her ears. "You know how upset they get when anybody gets outside the fences here and gets on the grass."

"Well, then, maybe we'll just have to figure out some way to get our own 'lots' to make sure we have enough hay to eat in the future," proposed Myrtle, rising to her feet to go munch at the hayrack.

"Fine, go eat again," grumbled Plum. "And, while you're feeding your face, I'm going to look through these papers to see if I can find some of those credit card applications that they throw away all the time. If we're going to buy 'lots' so we have enough to eat we're going to need a bunch of them."


"Myrtle, do you think a hoof-print signature will work with those applications?"

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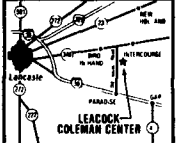
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