

# On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

## Joyce Bupp



Hay there. Since time immemorial, cows have eaten grass and its dried form, hay. Cows' inner-workings process forages through a four-stomach manufacturing process, which converts the grassy intake into two basic outputs.

One product is milk for their offspring and a diet staple for much of the world's population. A second output is a valuable soil nutrient builder which could, in our politically-correct extreme times, appropriately be labeled "used forage."

Once upon a time, all dairy cows grazed, gathering their own forages and automatically returning soil nutrients to be broken down by weathering and time. Grazing demands some significant volume of land devoted to grass. Modern land crunches and

herd size growth over the years have limited extensive grazing availability for dairy cows. Intensive grazing techniques, however, do continue to be popular and successful with a percentage of our dairy farms.

In climates where cold weather inhibits the growth of grass year-round, keepers of animals eons ago developed techniques to preserve feed for the off seasons. One of my most enduring memories of a European farm tour years ago is of a high mountain in Switzerland, where a farm family was hand-raking hay from a tiny and incredibly steep grass field.

Some animal species even gather their own hay for winter. The pika, a fluffy, small alpine rodent that lives high in the Western mountains, spends its

short summers stashing away mouthfuls of dried grasses in its rocky lair, feeding from that storage through the frozen months.

While hand-haying continues in remote parts of the world, equipment engineering has brought forage preservation light years ahead in our short lifetime. Our parents grew up on small general farms where they gathered and packed away loose piles of hay for their few cows. Our children (and I!) rejoiced with the arrival of our first large, round-baler years ago, saving endless hours of pitching bales around oven-like barn storage areas on humid, 90-degree July afternoons.

While we still harvest a few hundred small bales for calf and fresh cow feeding, the bulk of our hay moves in large rolls, impaled one by one on a sturdy, steel prong fastened to a loading device on the front end of a tractor. Giant, rectangular-shaped bales are more highly favored by growers, especially in the West, whose end goal is to ship and sell the packed forage. Rectangles stack better than rolls for distance hauling.

In an agriculture poll taken a few years ago, the large baler was voted the most important equipment technological improvement

of the century. That's certainly arguable, but hard to deny after unloading wagonfuls of small bales on a steamy, summer afternoon.

While handling techniques have modernized, some things about hay are constant.

Hay storage areas invite kids to jump, swing, tunnel, and climb high up to the spider-webbed, nether-reaches of a big barn stuffed with scratchy dry grass. Mother cats still find nooks and crannies among hay storage to curl up and give birth to their kittens. And, every spring, at least in our barn, one of our nasty, old hens will hunker down in a hay-mow corner to hatch out a nest of eggs.

So, in a world of constant change and uncertain times, making hay, in some form, remains an important part of rural agriculture and tradition.

Excuse me, now, while I go sweep all this dried, green "tradition" off the kitchen floor.



Milk IS the real thing!

## Best Range?

NAZARETH (Northampton Co.) — Glass-top ranges are currently the most popular choice. They heat quickly (five to seven seconds) and many include a warming burner. A pressure canner can be used on these burners, but not cast iron skillets; glass pans are not as efficient in heating foods on these stoves. Ease of cleaning is the main advantage. Disadvantages include having pots "walk" and some shiny surface tops may easily show marks like fingerprints.

Price differences is standard electric ranges relate primarily to the number of coils, with higher-priced models providing greater wattage for more cooking power. Newer ovens give more accurate temperature control, varying only 10 degrees from a given temperature setting, versus 30 degrees for older models.

Gas ranges now have electric ignitions instead of pilot lights, and closed burners. Some also have a warming drawer. Convection ovens can hold three racks. Their advantage is in cooking meats in a shorter time and resulting in a juicier product. They are not as good for baking.

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