

Week 32: Farming is hard work and a fulfilling way of life

A new sheep

By Johanna Taylor

Mount Mansfield Union High School, Grade 11

I'd always wanted a sheep. Then I got Maybell. She was little and white and very innocent looking. I immediately brought her out to the barn and then out to the grassy field with a string of electric fence intended to keep her in. Maybell walked around a little and then started eating the fresh green grass.

As soon as I turned to go inside, Maybell took off. She ran right under the nice little electric fence without even ducking, and straight for Mrs. Jones' beautiful vegetable garden. Mrs. Jones was the retired lady who lived by herself across the street. She had the biggest and best garden of anyone I had ever known. Mrs. Jones was very proud of her garden. Every summer she spent hours watering, weeding and tending that garden. And Maybell was trotting right through the middle of Mrs. Jones' prize garden.

Quickly I ran to catch her before Mrs. Jones noticed. But Mrs. Jones had already noticed.

"Get that sheep out of my garden. I just planted and now all my seeds have gone to waste."

"I'll replant the whole garden," I said, "and even pay for new seed packets."

Mrs. Jones kept fussing but she said, "No, don't worry about it, I'll replant it myself."

I kept on running because Maybell kept on running. She would stay just far enough ahead of me so I couldn't catch her. Every now and then she would stop, look back to make sure I was far enough away, and then she would pee to get rid of unneeded extra weight. Hopeful, I would lunge to catch her, but she would start trotting again. Finally we started running uphill. I could tell she was getting tired, so I gave one last burst of speed and locked my fingers into her white, curly fleece.

She kicked and wiggled, but I held firm. When she finally stopped, I grabbed her by the collar and started to lead her home. She didn't want to follow so instead she dug her feet firmly into the ground and pulled back. After struggling for a minute to pull her and not succeeding, I picked her up around the middle and started to slowly walk. Her feet dangled between my legs and swayed back and forth as I awkwardly trudged for home.

When I got home, I put a dog collar around Maybell's neck and tied her to a post with a dog leash. Perfect timing: The vet was scheduled to check up on Maybell and I had 15 minutes to go inside and freshen up before he arrived. When I came back from the house 10 minutes later, Maybell was in the neighbor's yard. My little brother was holding the leash. "Why did you let Maybell go?"

"She was hungry. She couldn't reach the good grass," he said.

I ran into the neighbor's yard. Maybell saw me and started trotting, but by this time she was tired out. I quickly caught up to her and grabbed that white curly fleece of hers. Once again I picked her up around the middle and started to slowly walk back to the house with Maybell's legs dangling between my own. I finally got her tied back to the post. I looked up and there was the vet, chuckling to himself.

Ode to farming

By Elijah Todd Davis

Home-schooled, Grade 7

I truly like our farm
But it's the land that gives me charm.
To look out on a field
And think of the crop it will soon yield.
The layer of snow like an ocean
Though it's never in motion.
To think of that celestial white
It gives me such delight
A delight needed to complete the work ahead
It lifts off my back a weight like lead
To get the cows up at three o'clock
For at times they can sleep like a rock!
This delight urges me on
Until the snow has up and gone.
There is no work like farming
Though I don't find it alarming
That you have to be real tough to work
For this is something you can't shirk.
Nothing beats living on a farm
For as my dad often states,
"Being on a farm teaches perspective,
And perspective is something over which
You should be protective."
I believe what he says is true
Because farms these days are few
And to many this kind of life is new.
What I am getting at here
Is as farms slowly disappear
So does the meaning of work
It is now only something to shirk
And so does the meaning of perspective
It is something over which you no longer need
to be protective.
Farm life is the life for me
Though bonded to work I feel free
If a door to life is shut, I always seem to have
the key
No matter what comes my way
I can always get through the day.
Farming gives you something more than per-
spective
It gives you two other things you need in life
It gives you experience, and from that
It gives you knowledge.
I don't know about anybody else
No matter how much I can complain
As a farmer
You have everything to gain.
I truly wouldn't have it any other way.
And now that this poem is ended
It's all I can do to keep more ideas at bay.

THAT BARN CAT



NICOLE GAREY, *Essex High School*

Garey writes this about her photograph: "I live with lots of cats. I wanted to take pictures of cats because they seem like real people to me and I wanted to share this with others. Each cat we live with has its own personality: Some are cute and friendly, while others are standoffish, and a few of our cats simply don't care at all."

PRIZE-WINNING TALES

We had a difficult time choosing the most interesting pieces on the prompt "Farming" from among 150+ high-quality submissions from around the state.

We publish here the five that received the most votes from our student and adult judges as well as two "notables." Each of the top five will receive \$50 plus a small block of vintage cheese courtesy of Cabot Cheese, Co.

We appreciate the response from young writers and also appreciate the support of Cabot, a farmer cooperative known for its award-winning cheese. Cabot has been a steady supporter of this annual prompt of the Young Writers Project.

~ Geoffrey Gevalt, *YWP Director*

My farming experience

By Tyler Schnabel

Rochester High School, Grade 10

Working on a farm is the first real job I have ever had. This is how I got the job: I was talking to my friend Thomas at school, and I asked him if he knew anybody who had any work they needed help with. He said that Liberty Hill Farm might. He also said that it was tire throwing time. So I thought to myself "no big deal right?" Wrong.

When I got there Thomas went up to his boss and asked if they needed any help. His boss said that they could always use help. Thomas told me to change into my work clothes. Nope. I did not have any. I was wearing all name-brand clothes. I didn't know what lay ahead of me. I'll tell you what, by the end of the day of throwing tires onto the corn silage pile I had blisters on both hands and my clothes were black and smelled of rotting things. My contacts, when I took them out, were tinted green.

After the day was over I thought, "All in all, today was pretty fun and interesting; I think I'll go back tomorrow."

So after a few days of throwing tires I asked for a part-time job.

He said, "You're here, aren't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "You are working, aren't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, there you go."

That was it. I had a job. And ever since then I have learned to drive the big tractors, milk cows, feed calves, throw tires, feed cows, till the pack barn, developed a good work ethic and have fun while working.

I am still working there three days a week and loving it!

Hot day on farm

By Peter Mack

Charlotte Central School, Grade 8

It was a hot July day, and we were headed to Williston to stack and bale hay for a horse farmer up there. It was scorching hot and we were already sweating just sitting in the truck. When we got there it was my job to be in the rafters because I was the shortest; it was also the hottest place in the hay mow. As we were stacking hay, my dad was baling more. No sooner than we had got one wagon unloaded, we had to unload another. They just kept coming until the dew fell and we could not bale any more. We were hot and sweating all day and it felt good when the night breeze blew and cooled us off some.

Being a farmer is very hard and doing hay is only one of the hard jobs on a farm. In the spring you have to do field work like plowing, harrowing and seeding. In the summer there is mowing, chopping and baling to do, and in the fall we have to chop corn, spread manure and plow. In the winter there is no tractor driving but lots of barn chores to do.

Lots of people say that it is a lot of work, which I guess it is, but you get used to it. It is not that bad unless, of course, you are doing hay, then it is dreadful. Some people say that farmers just sit on the tractors and do nothing. Well, that's what it looks like we are doing, but anyone would be exhausted after driving all summer. Also many people take farmers for granted, but if you think about it, a huge percentage of the food and drinks you eat were grown and raised by a farmer.

NOTABLES

Nicaraguan coffee

By Emma Redden

Leland and Gray Union High School, Grade 10

The sun sits high in the hazy sky, tanning your strong back below.

You are a farmer, a true definition of the six-letter word.

You live in a home made of cinder blocks, packed mud.

You are lucky; your house is more than bound sticks.

At least concrete isn't blown down in the winter rains.

It crumbles but only as slowly as you do.

Your earthen walls enclose a home, Filled with stuffed burlap sacks,

Secondhand clothes, and uncomfortable beds. At least your babies are nearby when they whimper in the night.

The outdoor bathroom is a simple relief from the

Stuffy stale air of indoors.

A black tarp surrounds a cavern in the ground

To dispose of human waste.

Over the makeshift bathroom

Stand trees, tall and proud.

They are your bread and butter,

Pan y mantequilla.

The lofty tree stands with dignity

Being sole shelter, refuge, protection

For the coffee plant below.

The bananas are still green

The coffee is still red.

Your hands and your back are still tired.

You never stop working and

Yet it still seems never to be enough.

The incredible beauty of the land

Is so harshly contrasted by the

Poverty of your life.

It is as if you were tricked,

Placed in such an idealistic landscape,

With such a demanding daily routine.

Sometimes it seems like it's an unfair game

And sometimes it seems a gift.

Days are long

Bodies are aching

Eyes are sore

And money is so fragile

The smallest movement could

Break apart the vase of your finances.

But at least you are given the gift

Of spending those long days

In a land painted by an angelic hand.

You are a Nicaraguan farmer.

Vermont welcome

By Halley Petersen

Woodstock Union High School Grade 10

The smell envelopes you, before it is even a speck upon the distant horizon.

The mustiness of home

A fresh summer rain

As it nears

The scent strengthens

Overwhelming upon a more

Delicate nose,

but simply welcoming

to your mind.

A farmer's life

By Kathryn Howrigan

Fairfield Center School, Grade 7

What do you think of when someone says farming? I bet you think of cows and milk. There's a lot more to farming than just that. Have you ever wondered what people have to do to get that milk? Or what farmers have to do to keep their cows healthy? Or how to raise calves?

Farming is hard work! A farmer's day begins at 4 in the morning when they do their morning milking. How long this takes depends on the number of cows you milk. If you have 250 cows, it could take up to four hours — on each end of the day. When farmers do chores they don't just milk; someone has to feed the cows, take care of the calves and keep the cows' stalls clean and bedded. All this has to be done whether it's 20 below zero, or 90 degrees and sweltering hot.

Milking the cows means you have to get them from their stalls in the barn and bring them into the parlor. As they file in, someone has to spray them with iodine to clean and sanitize their udders, and then put the milkers on. As the cows finish milking, they exit the parlor and the next group of cows files in. This continues until all 250 cows have been milked. While this is taking place, someone has to prepare the feed for the cows. In order for the feed to be nutritional for the cows and allow them to produce the greatest amount of milk, the feed has to have the right amounts of grain, corn, silage, haylage, and canola for both the high and low groups.

As all of this is happening, others are in charge of cleaning the barn and rebedding the stalls with sawdust so the cows stay happy and healthy. Last, but not least, someone has to take care of the calves. This requires scraping their stalls and bedding them with sawdust. This good care keeps them from getting sick. The small calves get fed milk replacer and are taught to eat grain and drink water. After these chores are done, the older heifers have to be hayed and grained.

This all may seem easy enough, but in winter months pipes can freeze or tractors won't start because of cold weather. These are all common occurrences on the farm in the winter.

A farmer's day ends around 7 p.m. You're probably thinking that if chores only last four hours a day, what does a farmer do the rest of the time? Depending on what season it is, farmers have a lot of work. During the spring farmers are preparing their fields to plant their corn, which they will harvest later in the year. Before they can plant their fields, they have to plow the fields, pick the larger stones out of the fields, harrow the fields to break up the soil, pick more stones out, and finally they can plant the corn seed.

Summer is another very busy season on the farm. Most farmers are fertilizing their hay field, cutting their hay for later use. Farmers are constantly fertilizing their fields between April 15 and December 15, when the law says you can't spread anymore. After their summer work is done, farmers harvest their corn fields and pack it into their bunks to feed to their cows throughout the winter months.

A farmer's life is full of long days and hard work. However, none of this matters, because if you truly love what you do, love the land and the animals, all the sacrifices are worth it.



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at
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