

Dear Diary: “Seven Days in a Farmer’s Winter”

by Vicky Fick

Vicky Fick, her husband Emery and their four children farm near Lake City, Minn. Their commercial “birth to beef” operation centers around 100 head of percentage Simmental cows. They use a purebred Angus bull on heifers and registered Simmental bulls on mature cows, then feed out all calves. This article, originally read at the Wabasha Company Beef Improvement Assn. banquet, allows us to laugh along with Fick’s daily routine—Vicky mentions that a few problems were borrowed from the neighbor, but they all sound pretty familiar.

MONDAY (January)

Milked cows. Fed the pigs. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Dead steer in feed lot. Looks like bloat. Must be something it ate. Called vet. Took trailer load of steers to Zumbrota Sales barn. Steers down a dollar. Bought nice brown cow—\$400. Put nice brown cow in with other cows. Vet here. Wants to talk to me. Vet said steer bloated, must have been something it ate. Paid vet \$16.

Pushed feed down self-feeder. Called banker and asked about a \$50,000 loan. Banker laughed. I didn’t. Put nice brown cow back in pasture with other cows. Fixed fence. Weaned pigs from 2 sows. Wired up gate between them. Ground 4 batches feed. Poked each batch out of mixer. Sows in with little pigs, knocked gate down. Nailed 2 x 6 across pen. Got nice brown cow in. Fixed fence. Started to snow. Milked cows. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Sows ate through 2 x 6. Locked them out of hog house.

TUESDAY (January)

Must have snowed all night. Milked cows. Cow not eating and not acting right. Must be Ketosis. Called Vet. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Shoveled snow out of bunks. Sows broke into hog house. Put baby pigs in chicken coop. Scooped snow out of driveway. Broke hose on loader tractor. Changed clothes. Used snowmobile to get nice brown cow in. Untangled electric fence wire from track. Fixed fence. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Vet here. Says cow not eating or acting right. Must be Ketosis. Watch her, if she gets worse call him. Paid vet \$16.

Neighbor called, nice brown cow in his

pasture. Sold nice brown cow to neighbor for \$350. We both fixed fence. Teenage daughter’s car won’t start. Froze up from running in ditch other night. Put Knipco heater on it. Fed pigs. Started cleaning barn. Daughter running and screaming. Car on fire, smoke coming from under the hood. Daughter called fire department. I run to house. Garden hose froze up. Grab fire extinguisher. Hood won’t open. Run for wrecking bar, Wrecking bar won’t open hood. Run to shed for tractor . . . Run back to shed for log chain. Pulled car away from house as fire department arrived.

Back to cleaning barn. Manure spreader froze up. Put Knipco heater on spreader. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Checked on pigs. Rendering truck here for the dead steer. Tire blown out on froze up manure spreader—got too hot. Called Apple’s Tire Service (in Millville) for new tire. Prompt service. Finished barn chores. Pushed feed down self-feeder.

WEDNESDAY (February)

Ground hog didn’t see his shadow today. How could he . . . we never have any sunshine anymore. Milked as usual. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Nice brown cow in my pasture. Called neighbor. Nobody home. Put brown cow in—fixed fence. Baby pigs have scours. Guess feed is too rich. Called vet. Sow farrowed 14 pigs! Hooked up heat lamp with extension cord. Hog prices up \$1.50. Banker called, said my note was due. I laughed. He didn’t. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Broke spring on the loader as I finished scooping last of the snow. Called Greenline Equipment.

Talked kids into finishing chores tonight. Going to treat the wife to supper at Clay’s Supper Club (in Plainview). Vet came, says pigs have scours. Feed must be too rich. Paid vet \$16. Called neighbor. Nice brown cow in my pasture. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Time to get ready to go out. Greenline Equipment here to pick up loader tractor. Neighbor here to get nice brown cow. Milkman is late, he slid off edge of driveway while leaving. Helped one kid out of self-feeder and then helped the other one milk a kicky heifer. Boy, am I late! Wife mad. Canned soup for supper.

THURSDAY (February)

Didn’t sleep good last night. Cats fighting under bedroom window all night. Holy Cow! Cats must’ve been fighting in barn last night too—three cows with stepped on teats. Finally finished milking. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Shipped load of pigs to Zumbrota Sales Barn. Hogs down \$4 today. Sow loose in hog barn. Chewed through extension cord. Ripped pants on hog house door. Sheared the wife’s 12 ewes this morning. Paid shearer \$24. Got \$21.50 for the wool. Went to Wabasha and signed up 50% in PIK program. Paid income tax. Hope I live to see Social Security!

Bought new extension cord and hip boots for wife. Socialized with neighbors. Late getting home. Wife started chores. Wife pushed feed down self-feeder. Wife put nice brown cow back in neighbor’s pasture. Couldn’t get fence working. Wife also got silo unloader stuck. I climbed the silo. Dig dig dig. Tell wife to put unloader on. Yell at wife four times to shut unloader off. I unplug it up

there. Wife says she can't hear me with 60 head of hungry young stock belling in one ear and silo unloader running in the other ear.

Late getting milking done. Still have to fix fence. Chased brown cow over to neighbor's side. Wife plugged in the fencer before fence is fixed. Quiet ride back to house. Wife looking in book. Says there must be some words in there I forgot to call her today! Watch 10 o'clock news. IRS is trying to figure how to tax farmers twice in PIK program.

FRIDAY (March)

Greenline brought loader tractor back this morning. Total bill is \$282.65. \$280 for labor and 2.65 for parts, including tax. Cows with stepped on teats all have mastitis. Called vet. Bought nice brown cow from neighbor—\$375. *Maybe she'll stay in my pasture now. She's looking a little peaked.* Pushed feed out. Got my annual letter from Wabasha County Treasurer, Martin Beyer's office today. Land values down. My taxes went up. Think I'll pay half of what they're worth—just like I get for my products.

Extension Agent Dennis Crowley stopped today. Says I should plant black walnut trees on the "80" instead of corn. Says in 40 years they'll be worth a fortune. I tell Mr. Crowley how to find his way off place. Banker called,

said my note was past due. Nobody laughed. Sent check. Vet here. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Vet says 3 cows have mastitis. Paid vet \$16. Says he'll send bill for mastitis tubes. And don't forget to dump the milk away!

Family wants to go to the basketball game. Everybody helps to do chores. Help kid out of self-feeder. Chores done. I'm last in the shower. Hot water all gone again!

SATURDAY (March)

Nice brown cow had twin calves in pasture last night. Carried them to the barn. Twin calves looking peaked. Called vet. Pushed feed down self-feeder. Pick-up won't start. Need a pull. Banker called, said he might give me the loan if the cattle prices would go up. I laughed. He did, too. Loader tractor broke down again. Can't get a decent station on the radio.

While putting cows back in barn this morning a heifer slipped on soupy cement. Totally splashed wife. I only see blinking white eye balls. I stifle it! Offer my red hanky to wife. Bedded pole barns. Bedding supply mighty low. Vet here. Says peaked looking cow usually has peaked looking twin calves. Paid vet \$30—\$10 a piece.

Wife stuck in mud closing a gate. Throw her a rope. Use tractor and loader to get wife out. Hose barefoot wife off by our side milk-

house. Said I could have used warm water. Wife mad. Guess I won't get pickup started today. Retrieve hip boots next July.

OPEC Countries having gas war. Yipee! Gas prices dropping. Governor going to put more tax on gas. No Yipee! Prices go up because we use too much. The prices go up because we conserve. Now more taxes. What next? Block is putting 50 cents tax on milk. That's what's next! Fix that—I'll go to Zumbrota Sales Barn Tuesday and buy more milk cows!

SUNDAY (March)

Late for church again. Sermon same as month ago. Fell asleep. Wife elbowed me. Banged my head on support post. People turned and looked at me. Wife mad. Had popcorn for dinner. Sent little kids along with big ones to movie this afternoon. House very quiet. Whoopee! Chored as usual the rest of the day. Hit the sack early for another busy week. Night honey. I love you.

Now I lay me down to sleep. Please watch o'er my cattle, pigs and sheep. Lord, I hate to be one to complain. So I'll gladly take all this rain. 'Stead of something a whole lot worse. Like crops and cattle dying of thirst. And with my family I hope you stay. Guide each one so he does not stray. When from this farming I depart ever thankful, How Great Thou Art. Amen. **AJ**