Today's farmwife: old story, new twist

**Editor’s note:** Holly Spangler is a field editor for our sister publication, Prairie Farmer. You can follow her My Generation blog at [www.FarmProgress.com](http://www.FarmProgress.com), or check out the Prairie Farmer Facebook page.

By HOLLY SPANGLER

I am a farmwife. There are bolts in my purse, tools in my pickup and manure in my yard. I have a mudroom. I haul meals to the field, pack endless lunches and remind my three children of who their father is during the busy seasons.

I also have a career. Off the farm. But sort of on the farm. I’m a field editor for the Illinois-based Prairie Farmer. My home has an office, and very often I get to tromp around fields with some of the finest farmers on earth and pass their stories on to our readers, which I’ve done on a part-time basis since my kids were born. Occasionally, I even get dressed up and go to meetings. Heels and everything.

And then I come home. And there’s manure in the yard.

But I am blessed.

I’m a modern farmwife, with all that entails: The boots, the mud, the stress, the long hours, the breakdowns, the harvest that never ends, and Saturdays that are just like every other day of the week. And then the cows get out. Days off are few and far between.

But the upsides are innumerable. We have wide-open spaces and the quietness of a house on a dead-end road, with cattle, deer and corn right outside the window. We watch food grow.

I eat lunch with my husband nearly every day, which, with three kids under 7, is a welcome respite of adult conversational heaven.

**Key Points**

- A farmwife’s life is far from ordinary.
- The education of a farm kid rivals drama in the movies.
- The life of a farmwife today is a new twist on a very old story.

**Farm kid education**

And bonus No. 1 of farm life: farm kids. Our little kids are more fortunate than they may ever know. They’re growing up with bottle calves and barn kittens. And they’re learning stuff.

From the combine cab last fall, 5-year-old Nathan spotted two deer, a coyote, a hawk and a rabbit. He even saw the hawk “swoop down and scoop up that wabbit!” Let’s see a book or movie try to top that.

It gets even better. This past spring, my little man spent most afternoons in the tractor, working down ground with our neighbor and farm employee, “Mr. Jerry.” When they’d finish up, they’d head over to Jerry’s for a little fishing, then back home where he’d feed his bottle calf, Buttercup, and maybe do a little four-wheeler riding before dinner. If he could just get out of making his bed in the morning, he’d be leading his dream life.

And I think I may be, too.

**CAPTURING FARM LIFE:** Getting together for a quick family photo in the midst of corn harvest offers the Spangler kids a chance to catch up with their dad. Pictured with parents John and Holly are (left to right) Nathan, Jenna and Caroline.

My days are varied. A day of work for Prairie Farmer brings writing, blogging, perhaps some travel, and maybe a photo shoot.

A day at home brings lots of meals, errands, laundry, cleaning (recall the aforementioned manure), runs for parts or vet medicine, trips back and forth to the field, or during harvest, perhaps a day in the semi.

As I do, many of my peers work off the farm. I can think of very few who stay home full time, driving a tractor alongside their husbands as our mothers and grandmothers may have done. Technology has changed, and our husbands don’t need us in the field. Or more to the point, they need our off-farm insurance more than our on-farm tractor driving.

**Rolling with it**

Though the day-to-day has changed considerably, I believe the role of a farmwife has changed very little over time. The farm women of my generation are still working hard, supporting and rallying our husbands. We help market grain, and we know agronomy.

We can spot a good bull, and we can tell a classroom of school-children — or a World Wide Web of blog readers — why farming is important to them.

Many of us still cook meals for everyone working on the farm on a given day. Some still haul food to the fields. On a side note, that may be where the similarity ends. My mother-in-law is more likely to make a delicious meal of pork chop sandwiches, buttered potatoes, corn and dessert, lovingly served with real plates and real forks out of the trunk of her car.

I’m more a Casey’s-pizza-on-tray kind of a girl. With toes, corn and dessert, lovingly served with real plates and real forks out of the trunk of her car. I’m more a Casey’s-pizza-on-the-tailgate kind of a girl. With a roll of paper towels.

But it gets the job done. And I am blessed. Working part time in agriculture lets me be home with my children, and I bring a little agricultural information back to the farm. It’s not revolutionary — just a new twist in the very old story of farmwives bringing real value back to the farm.