

# Like a pair of proud parents

As we wind down to the final week-end of October, it's a somber thought that winter is in fact just around the corner.

And as the days become shorter and shorter, I'm reminded I should be wrapping up those jobs that are impacted by the weather, before the snow blows.

Surveying things in the barn last weekend, I decided it was time to clean out some sheep pens.

For those who aren't experienced in such matters, 'pen cleaning' means cleaning the accumulation of manure built up in the pen over the last few months.

Cleaning the pens out isn't really a bad job, or a 'Dirty Job' as the television show would have us believe. All the pens I've built in the barn are designed to be cleared with a skid steer loader, not by hand with a fork, which eliminates most of the manual labour.

But before one cleans out a pen, there's one thing that must be done before even firing up the skid steer loader.

You see, ya gotta move the sheep who are occupying that pen.

And the pen I decided needed immediate attention was occupied by Dodge the ram, and his 'harem' of nine ewes.

Dodge and the 'girls' have been sharing this pen for a bit, enjoying a 'wink, wink, nudge, nudge' month-long party, for the sole purpose of propagating a bunch of little 'Dodges' and 'Dodgettes', hopefully arriving early next spring.

The Sidekick is always a bit cautious of Dodge when he's out of the pen. Sure, she'll pet his head when he leans over the top of the pen, but open that door, and she's a bit nervous.

I agree that a ram should be given a fair bit of respect, but I wonder if her cautiousness could be attributed to her exposure to a certain attack rooster named Jack.

Living on a farm all my life, one learns early in the game that animals can sense emotions in the people around them. If you yell or chase them, they will respond by doing the same, running around like a destruc-

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tive fool.

If you move them quietly and patiently, you'll usually be rewarded with them behaving, and it's quite likely your blood pressure will also be in a healthier range.

I've told The Sidekick time and time again, that she has nothing to fear, but she assumes she has a flashing red sign on her forehead that screams 'FEAR' when any of the aforementioned males are on the loose.

This time, her fear was all in vain. We opened the door to the empty pen, opened the door to the other pen, and all 10 sheep sauntered across to the new pen, in single file— notta bit of trouble.

"And they say sheep are stupid," I remarked to The Sidekick. "Look at how they moved from one pen to another. They knew exactly where we wanted them to be."

Once they were moved, I fired up the loader and began cleaning the original pen, while they watched and munched on hay.

In 45 minutes, the pen was clean, fresh straw bedding was spread in the pen, and it was time to move 'em back.

Again, we opened both doors, and all 10 slowly and quietly wandered back to their original pen.

Like a pair of proud parents at a school Christmas concert, The Sidekick and I stood there and shared a grin, as the gate latched behind them.

"They're good 'kids'," I remarked, then suddenly realized how silly I sounded.

But notta problem, as The Sidekick agreed.

"Yup, we've raised 'em well," she grinned.

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