

There is an old saying that states: "As the days begin to lengthen, the cold begins to strengthen." This year, in our part of the country, there has been more than a smidgen of truth in that declaration. I look at the thermometer every morning when I get up, and it has read--in Fahrenheit--zero degrees or below on nine of the first fifteen days in February. This morning it was minus 21.

Admittedly, we live in a cold spot. We have been accused of having a "lousy microclimate," but we aren't complaining. Our family members, in general, seem to thrive during the winter. Some of us are, in fact, much more likely to wilt in summer heat.

Talk of the weather brings up the subject of winter clothing. There is another old saying: "There is no bad weather, just bad clothing." That is probably carrying it a little too far, but it is certainly true that dressing for the cold is the first and most important step in being comfortable during a Michigan winter.

I am somewhat amused, and even a little perplexed, when I see pictures in magazines of smartly dressed people in rural settings. We would never make the list of the fashionably attired farmers. We might be in the forefront of those who dress comfortably, though.

This is my winter farm wardrobe: In addition to the usual underclothing and a tee shirt, I wear leggings that double as long underwear. This is my "inside" costume. When I go outside or to the barn, I add: cotton socks with hand knit, hand spun wool socks over them, flannel lined denim jeans, a navy blue fleece pullover, a purple fleece pullover, a raggedy brown duck jacket lined with fleece, a gray stocking cap compliments of the auction barn, a red and blue hand knit wool stocking cap, rubber barn boots, and three pairs of yellow work gloves.

Some of this needs explanation. The flannel lined jeans are out at the knees--just the denim part. The flannel is intact, but these pants will be discarded after the April lambing season. They will not see another winter. I've had the jacket for four or five years. It was a \$4 purchase at Goodwill. Handling hay at feeding time has shredded the pocket areas, and there are strings of brown duck hanging here and there. It is very comfortable, but it, too, may be enjoying its last winter season.

I started with just one stocking cap, but as the winter progressed and grew colder, I added the red and blue one to

supplement the gray headgear. I also began with one pair of yellow gloves. Then, as winter set in, I added a second pair. The number three gloves have the basic responsibility of covering any thin spots in pairs one and two.

If it gets really cold, I put on my Carhart coveralls, but they are too warm for inside-the-barn work.

The weak spot in this getup is the footwear. Barn boots--the high rubber ones--are not warm. But, they are easy to keep clean, and I can wash them off before I leave the barn, so I don't drag soiled boots into the house when I come in.

Runo's outer winter wear doesn't exhibit quite the ragged quality of mine, not because he is a fashion plate, but because he does not become as attached to totally worn out clothing as I do. He will give up a pair of jeans or a jacket when it begins to look as if a giant feline has raked the front of it. To my way of thinking, it is at that point that a jacket becomes really comfortable, and I mourn its loss whenever I finally dispose of it.

Runo's last barn jacket was a little ragged, and he had planned on getting a new one when, a couple of Januaries ago, we had a new little calf in some of this below zero weather. It was inside, but it was still cold. Runo took off his jacket, and turned it into a calf coat. He put her front legs through the sleeves, buttoned it under her belly, and the collar just reached her ears. She was quite comfortable, and Runo moved his "good" jacket to "barn jacket" status.

Because he has more tractor work than inside jobs during chore time, Runo wears his lined Carhart coveralls when the temperature is below zero. So, he presents a more respectable image to the outside world. Of course, there are no visitors in these temperatures, anyway, and the driveway is presently blocked with snow drifts. And yet, I am not trying to be facetious when I say that this is my favorite season of the year.