

Here on Coe Creek this is another time of transition. This is a process that happens several times each year, and it is always a bit confusing and stressful.

The last pens of lambs—except the triplets and their mothers—are out on pasture now. That has made a considerable change in our daily routine. There are no more mornings and evenings punctuated by the insistent baas of ewes demanding that they are the next ones to be fed. There are no customers demanding water, then not drinking it—and leaving no tip for the waiter.

Without sheep in the hay barn, it doesn't take so long for someone to find time to bring an armful of hay to Alvik, the Norwegian fjord gelding. So, he does not squeal and complain. And Pony has less to stomp her feet about.

In the other barn the cows are nearly all on pasture. Lily's big steer calf, Kiddo, is in the barn because he has refused to be weaned, and he is capable—as he has shown—of jumping several fences to get back to his mother. She comes into the barn every morning to be milked, and she has no interest in Kiddo, but he can't quite believe that she means it.

But, when I began to milk Lily after a winter of letting this big calf do the job, I think I found out why he is so determined to nurse. And it also explains why Lily is so skinny. With the grass green, succulent, and nutritious now, Lily began milking a lot more, even though this is the end of her lactation. So, I assembled the cream separator and ran her milk through it. It was very rich, the butterfat nearly clogging the separator. And when I put the thick cream into the mixer I use to churn, I had hardly turned my back when I heard the distinctive slosh of butter gathered up and ready to wash and pack. The one thing it doesn't explain is why Lily is so ill-tempered. But, for this much cream, we can put up with her.

Most of the rest of the stress surrounding this seasonal transition centers around the vegetable garden. It isn't the labor involved, though that is considerable. Instead, the worry comes concerning when to plant certain vegetables, when to set out tomatoes, when it looks like frost that would mean we need to cover the tender plants, and when the local woodchucks are about to come calling. After the garden is started and growing, those concerns—except for the woodchuck—fade away and we find something else to worry about.

Gradually, though, we settle into a new routine—moving sheep and cattle from one paddock to another, milking and turning the cream separator for the two cows we usually milk during the summer, and hoeing, weeding, and, finally, harvesting from the garden.

And we mustn't forget looking for ticks. That has become a nightly routine, too.

The country is that brilliant spring green that we don't see any other time of year. It is worth taking time to appreciate the beauty of May, something even we “winter people” try to do.