

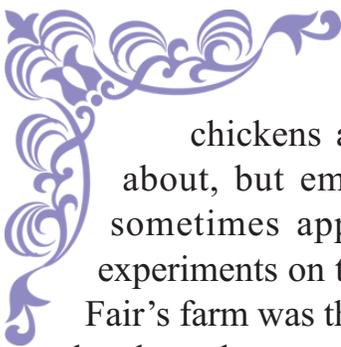


**A Fiscal Fairy Tale**

*By Tom Brown*

# *The Ugly Cash Cow*

There was a farmer, Les A. Fair, known far and wide for his really free-and-open farmstead. One thing stood out as bold fact: whatever worked, *worked*. “Don’t mess with success,” said Les more often than not. Yet Les A. Fair was always willing to listen to other ideas — about any aspect of the farm, even about the farm’s collection of animals — if they held a promise of success. Sure,



there were always chickens and kittens scampering about, but emus and buffalo would sometimes appear as free-and-open experiments on the farm — and only on Fair’s farm was this the case. They didn’t last long, however: emus and buffalo just didn’t prove to be successful.

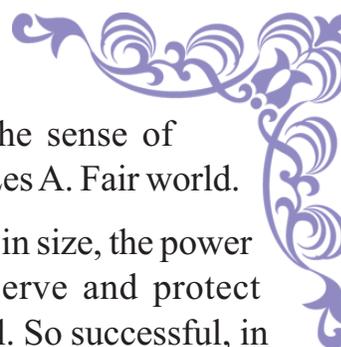
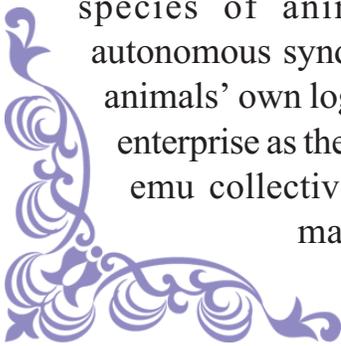
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*The cats shunned her; the horses ignored her; other calves formed cliques and denied her any opportunity to join.*

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When a new calf was born, few in the barnyard area were optimistic after they saw her. “Look at that pitiful thing: scruffy hair, deformed face, thin legs; she can’t even walk right,” said the hen to some of her brood one day. “I’m not saying that *all* new-borns aren’t a blessing from Heaven, I’m just glad you chicks don’t look like that poor, ugly calf.”

Life didn’t get any prettier (or happier) for the calf as she matured, nor did the animals’ opinions sway toward the positive. The cats shunned her; the horses ignored her; other calves formed cliques and denied her any opportunity to join. This was especially unfortunate since Les A. Fair’s farm operated more or less as a cartel. Every species of animal was part of an autonomous syndicate, organized by the animals’ own logic into as productive an enterprise as they could be. Save a failed emu collective, most of the animals made *lots* of cash for the

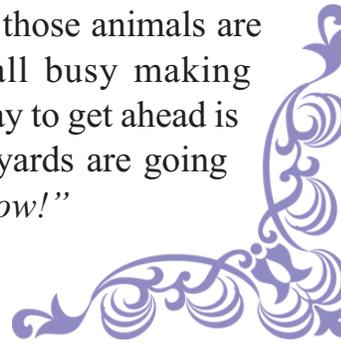


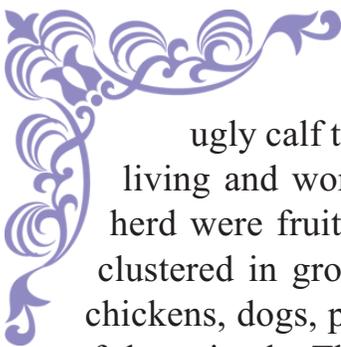
farm; and, without exception, they liked the sense of being successful in the Les A. Fair world.

As the Fair Farm grew in size, the power of the animals to preserve and protect themselves grew as well. So successful, in fact, were the chickens that they were able to buy off the threats of nearby foxes, who accepted payola and focused their fangs only on rabbits instead of newborn chicks. Every breed of animal on the farm had a chance at making a profitable livelihood. It was not a farm for loners. Loners weren’t really welcome on Les A. Fair’s farm; they couldn’t make any money alone.

The ugly calf, growing older each day, knew what it was like to be spurned not only by all the other cows but also by every other animal on the farm. Even the emus, who had no quarrel with her during their brief residence, rejected her friendly advances, pretending no comprehension of what she said.

“Mama,” said the ugly calf one day, a single large tear trickling down her sorry-looking snout, “why doesn’t anyone here like me?” Her mother just shook her head left and right as she munched a jawful of grass. Most of the time, the ugly calf was relegated to the furthest corner of the farm fields — alone. This relentless isolation, however, created a very independent mind in the young cow. “You know, it really doesn’t matter what all those animals are doing. Sure, they’re all busy making money today, but the way to get ahead is to figure out how farmyards are going to be successful *tomorrow!*”

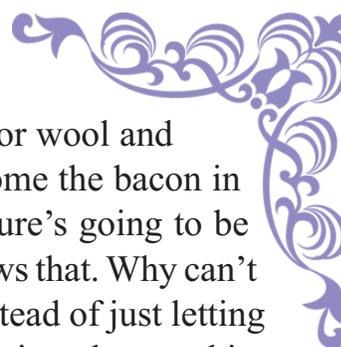
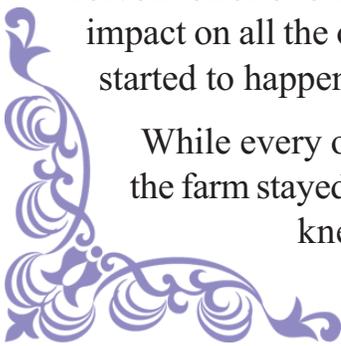




All attempts by the ugly calf to sell her philosophy of living and working to the rest of the herd were fruitless. Most of the cows clustered in groups, as did the horses, chickens, dogs, pigs, sheep, and the rest of the animals. They liked being in their own syndicate and making hay, so to speak, with whatever their work was for the day. Over time, this behavior became more and more universal and myopic. Every animal tried to do only what its peers were doing; success bred conformity and sameness. Success was reduced itself to “the one best way,” the way that made money — *now*. This meant that over time, Les A. Fair’s farm operations started to — *gasp* — fall into a very deep rut.

Since the ugly calf had lots of time to watch and take notes on farm progress, she could see the slipping fortunes of the farm and all its enterprises. She watched — and she worked. Mr. Fair didn’t notice any changes; and if Mrs. Fair did, she kept mum on the subject. No dog barked in alarm; no cat meowed about the decline even once. Yet, week after week, another express mail delivery would arrive for the ugly calf, who was rapidly becoming a full-grown cow. Test tubes, computer parts, and experimental ingredients of every conceivable type were being ordered by, and delivered to, the ugly calf without anyone noticing or caring. Her fervent efforts to find the future had little impact on all the others, until big changes started to happen.

While every other breed of animal on the farm stayed in the one business they knew well, the ugly cow



rejected the notion that sheep were only good for wool and that pigs could bring home the bacon in only *one* way. “The future’s going to be different; everyone knows that. Why can’t we *shape* the future, instead of just letting it happen to us? Life isn’t just about making money. Why can’t we find out what people are going to need and then serve them with new inventions?” That was what the ugly

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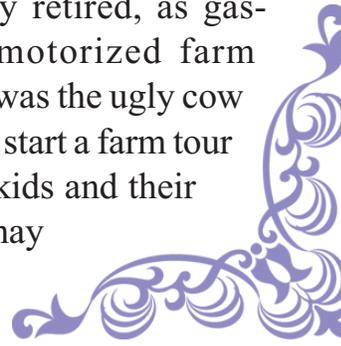
*In time, the ugly cow’s imagination and alternative thinking started to pay off.*

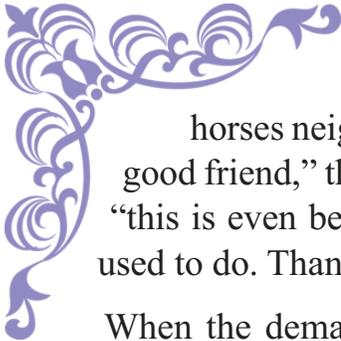
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cow said to every other animal on the farm. “Sure, sure, now go away. Can’t you see we’re busy?” was their pat reply. But this cow *never* saw the situation as utterly hopeless. “I’ll show them — someday. They’ll love me when they need me. And they will. *They will!*”

Using an abandoned area of a small deserted barn, the ugly cow studied every animal enterprise on the farm and asked “If, for whatever reason, they absolutely *couldn’t* do what they’re doing now — what else *could* they do?” In time, the ugly cow’s imagination and alternative thinking started to pay off.

When the horses all started to find themselves prematurely retired, as gas-powered plows and motorized farm equipment moved in, it was the ugly cow who suggested that they start a farm tour service, taking excited kids and their parents on educational hay





wagon rides. The horses neighed with delight. “Hey, good friend,” they said to the ugly cow, “this is even better work than what we used to do. Thank you. *Oh*, thank you!”

When the demand for whole milk and heavy cream started to drop dramatically, as people scorned calories and cholesterol, it was the ugly cow who suggested that alternative forms of milk, with all the flavor but none of the drawbacks, could be

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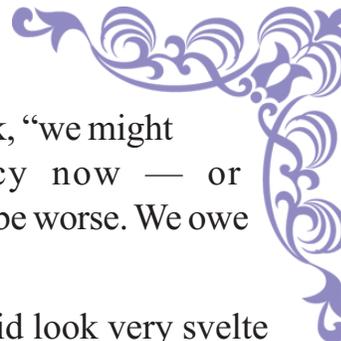
*...it was the ugly cow who moored them awake...*

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invented and sold. All the other cows, who feared being put out to pasture — forever — bellowed their pleasure at their newfound prosperity. “Oh, why didn’t any of us think about these possibilities? You have saved us! When we ignored you, we didn’t realize all the things you are indeed!”

Even when Mr. and Mrs. Fair agonized over the sorry effects of growing tobacco, and saw its relative value shake under the weight of sagging social opinion, it was the ugly cow who moored them awake to the widespread need for soybeans in all kinds of foods and commercial products. “Had we kept on planting more tobacco,” they said



to the ugly cow while stroking her scruffy neck, “we might be facing bankruptcy now — or ignominy, which would be worse. We owe you a lot!”

The ugly cow never did look very svelte or manicured or polished or coiffed. Designer clothing never fit her, but then it never appealed to her either. What *did* appeal to her was formulating one good idea after another. It was not all that long before every major facet of farm income — from one acre of the farm to the next — was attributed to her preparation to *form* the future, not just *face* it.

With her success and profit generation, she soon became known as “the ugly cash cow.” But she didn’t mind the title: her beauty was brain-wide, not skin-deep. As she ambled to her deserted thinking lab one day, she turned her head backward for just a minute and beheld a most curious sight. Every farm animal was rushing to catch up with her.



The End

Illustration and layout by Mac Thornton

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