*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Reader feedback keeps columnist grateful, humble**

One of the great joys in writing a column is receiving feedback from readers. Any writer will say he or she loves hearing words of praise. It’s positive affirmation that those scribblings have touched someone. My work has made a difference, even if only for a few minutes.

But to prevent my britches from bursting — or whistling the tune “It’s Hard to be Humble” — I appreciate criticism as well. It’s more difficult to take but makes me realize that I put on those britches one leg at a time like everyone else.

A few weeks ago, I was at an event sponsored by a group of retired educators. I told them how much I admired their work and reminded them of the difference they made in so many lives.

Turns out I had some fans in the room as well, as a few stopped to speak with me. One was from a farm family. She said she and her husband appreciate how my column connects agriculture with many people who don’t understand farm life.

But she added — and I am paraphrasing here — it might be nice if I could emphasize that farmers today are extremely educated business people who use technology and advanced practices to produce a lot of food and products. People reading about my exploits may have the wrong impression.

She’s right. Farmers are not a bunch of bib-overall-clad uneducated folks with stalks of grass in their mouths, wearing straw hats and carrying pitchforks. Although that pretty much describes me — with a manure fork instead of a pitchfork — that’s certainly not today’s farmer.

For those who don’t believe me, take a look at the latest farm show or attend a farm event this year. People will be surprised how most current farms are operated.

I also received reader feedback from Mike Young of Hillpoint, Wis., who said he enjoyed reading my articles in the *Reedsburg Independent*newspaper — especially those about cutting wood.

“This week’s column really struck a ‘cord’ with me,” Young wrote in an email. “We have burned wood for over 40 years to heat our house and sometimes the shed. I love wood heat, and will miss it when I am unable to do the work any longer.”

Young said he and his wife every spring fill their covered lean-to with three 60-foot rows.

“Like you, I always notice woodpiles as I drive down the road,” he wrote. “And I especially appreciate a good one, although they can — as you wrote — make a guy a little jealous at times.”

Young shared a picture of his tidy woodshed; it also showed a nice trailer that I’m assuming is used for hauling. That, my friends, is a veteran wood gatherer. Hats off to the Youngs.

Speaking of wood, I have added 20 loads cut from our woods. I’ve hauled them to our outdoor wood burner in my rusty and usually trusty 21-year-old pickup truck. Surprisingly the truck still has its tailgate, which I put down to provide additional stacking area.

The other day I tackled two dead oak trees halfway up a snow-covered hill. Even in four-wheel drive the truck couldn’t reach the cut wood. In a rare moment of ingenuity as opposed to brawn, I rolled a dozen or so round chunks down the hill closer to the truck. I then split them and threw them in the box. The additional weight from the wood gave me more traction; I was able to back up closer to the rest of the wood.

I’ve always believed the half-ton hauling capacity is just a guideline. I know I have a good load when the front tires just kiss the ground. Thankfully I was only hauling it a short distance.

With apologies to real farmers, keep providing feedback and I’ll do my best to stay grateful, humble and busy cutting wood.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.*