"Yarning" for the Past:
A Sweater Fit for a Cow

A stranded colorwork sweater for a life-sized fiberglass cow
Pattern created by Lisa Janice (LJ) Cohen

This project was undertaken as part of the [Cow Parade at Old Sturbridge Village](#) in Sturbridge, Massachusetts in early summer 2025. I was one of the artists chosen to decorate a fiberglass cow that would eventually be auctioned off to support the museum. I had 60 days to complete it.

Because (until now!) you couldn't just search on Ravelry for a sweater for a life-sized cow, I had to create the pattern that is reproduced below.

If you are interested in a more in-depth look at the process of designing and knitting this sweater, I have details on my blog: https://starfieldfarm.com/category/cow-parade/

The cow, along with 24 other decorated bovines, will be on display at Old Sturbridge Village through September 28th, 2025. This was the first time anyone has knit a garment for a Cow Parade cow.

This pattern is offered freely. The author takes no responsibility for injuries to the knitter or the sweater or bovine in attempting to dress a real cow!

Feel free to contact me at lisa@ljcohen.net if you have any questions.

Yarn: Alafosslopi

Amount: approximately 25 skeins, various colors – exact amount will depend on how much of the sweater is knit plain and how many colorwork motifs you desire.

This is knit in the round and steeked

Size 10 needles, or needles to make gauge below
60" (153 cm) and 15" (38 cm) cables

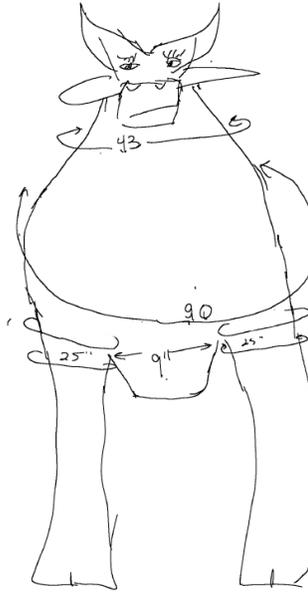Gauge: 12 stitches/16 rows = 4" (10 cm)

Figure 1: Figure 1: Initial measurements for the cow. (in inches) Note: I am not skilled at drawing and this is not to scale

BODY

- C.O. 130 + 3 stitches for the steek *(rest of instructions assume the 3 stitch steek throughout so it's not included in the stitch count. Knit the steek stitches, alternating colors when working motifs to lock them in. My preferred method to secure a steek before cutting is needle felting.)*
- Join and K1P1 ribbing for 4" (10 cm)
- Use a marker for the BOR after the steek stitches. This will be at the center of the cow's belly.
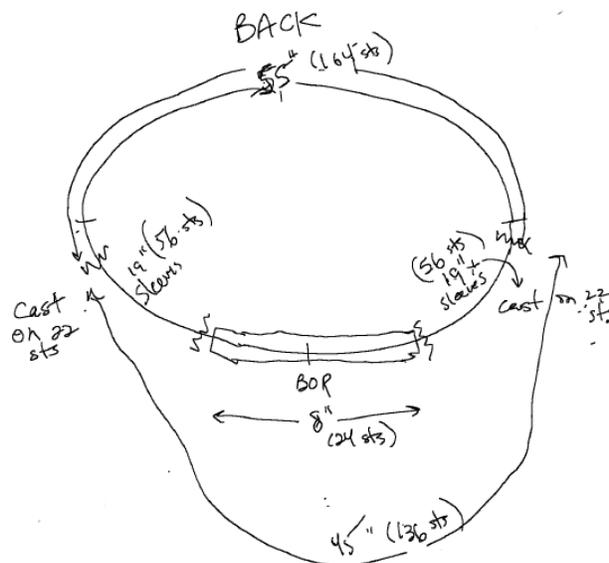
YOKE

NOTE on yoke: chose 3 motifs of approximately 14 rows each. If you choose motifs with fewer rows, add plain knit rows to make up the difference. All increases are done in plain rows between the motifs. You will need a total of 52 rows for the yoke.

- Set up for yoke (1st increase): K2, (M1, k3) 5 times, (M1, k4) 24 times, (M1, k3) 5 times, M1, k2 (adds 35 stitches to 165)
- Knit motif of your choosing. If you need to add or subtract a few stitches to make the math work, go ahead. Return to optimal stitch count before the increase row.

- 2nd increase: K3, (M1, K5) 12 times, (M1, K4) 10 times, (M1, K5) 12 times, M1, K2 (adds 35 stitches to 200)
- Knit motif of your choosing. If you need to add or subtract a few stitches to make the math work, go ahead. Return to optimal stitch count before the increase row.
- 3rd increase: K3 (M1, K6) 12 times, (M1, K5) 10 times, (M1, K6) 12 times, M1, K3 (adds 35 stitches to 235)
- Knit motif of your choosing. If you need to add or subtract a few stitches to make the math work, go ahead. Return to optimal stitch count before the increase row.
- 4th increase: K4 (M1, K7) 12 times, (M1, K6) 10 times, (M1, K7) 12 times, M1, K3 (adds 35 stitches to 270
- Knit plain in the round for 4-6 rounds.
- 5th increase: K5 (M1, K9) 29 times, M1, K4 (adds 30 stitches to 300)

SEPARATE FOR THE SLEEVES/LEGS

Figure 2: Circumference of cow with measurements (in inches) showing where the sleeves will be placed

NOTE for sleeve separation: Unlike a sweater for a human, the sleeve placement for the cow is asymmetrical. About 15% of the circumference is at the front of the shoulders, 85% at the back of the shoulders.

- K12, cast on 22 (for the underarm/body), slip next 56 onto waste yarn/holder (for the sleeve), K164, slip next 56 onto waste yarn/holder (for the sleeve), cast on 22 (for the underarm/body), K12
- Place a stitch marker at the center of the cast on stitches at each underarm
- This will leave 232 stitches for the body post separation.

COW BODY

NOTE on the body: Feel free to add as many/few motifs as you wish. I've included some of the motifs I designed on graph paper to use as is or as inspirations for your own. Remember to work out the math for the number of repeats and how many stitches you'll want between each one. Since there will be increases here, you can choose to do them gradually every other row, or more steeply between motifs.

- I chose to increase 1 stitch at the beginning and end of every round 34 times to increase to 300 total body stitches by the bottom ribbing.
- Knit as many motifs as you like for a total body length of approximately 40" (102 cm) or length to the udder.
- Finish the body with K1P1 ribbing for 4" (10 cm) (16 rows) (If desired, you may switch to smaller needles)
- cast off loosely

SLEEVES

NOTE on sleeves: The sleeve opening is 26" (66 cm) (56 stitches on holder + 22 cast on stitches for the underarm) The sleeves rapidly decrease in circumference from 26" (66 cm) to 12"(30.5 cm) in 17" (43 cm) of length. Ideally motifs for the sleeves will have short repeats. Incorporate motifs as you choose, remembering that you need to leave room for the decreases so the patterns don't get distorted.

- With circular needles on shorter cables, starting at underarm marker, pick up and knit 11 stitches, then transfer and knit 56 holder stitches, then pick up and knit 11 more stitches for the sleeve. (Beginning total: 78 stitches)
- Knit 4 rounds
- Decrease 1 stitch at beginning and end of round every 3rd row 17 times until you have 44 stitches
- Work even until the end of desired sleeve length before ribbing (Approximately 17" or 43 cm).
- K1P1 ribbing for 2" (5 cm)
- cast off loosely.

PREPARE FOR THE STEEK

- My preferred method, especially with alafosslopi, is to needle-felt the steek line. Please do so from the RIGHT side. When the fibers look a bit matted and tangled on the WRONG side, it is safe to cut, but don't cut yet!!
- Pick up 3 stitches in every group of 4 for a total of 138 stitches in each button band.
  ○ Given the size and the amount of handling finishing this garment requires, I advise picking up the button bands BEFORE cutting the steek, even if you don't want to complete the bands. Put the live stitches on waste yarn or use cable ends to secure your button band stitches.

- CAREFULLY, with cardboard inside the sweater body, slowly snip up the center of the middle knit stitch of your 3 needle felted steek stitches until the sweater is fully open.
- Complete your button bands. With this yarn and such large needles, you don't even need to create button holes.
- Sew in 10 buttons evenly spaced on one side of the sweater's ribbing.

FINISHING

- Because I knew this sweater would be a permanent fixture on the (fiberglass) cow, I didn't worry about weaving in ends. I made square knots and cut the excess yarn ends.
- Block by soaking in a bathtub for a good 30 minutes to relax the fibers
- Roll in LOTS of big towels
- If the weather permits and you have a large outdoor table, lay out of direct sunlight and let it dry, flipping it over every few hours.

DRESSING THE COW

- Remember – a fiberglass cow's legs won't bend! The only way the sweater was going to get on the cow was if it was still a bit damp to give me the extra stretch. If it hadn't have had the give, I would have had to add a lifeline and cut open the sleeve to graft on the cow later. (Luckily, I didn't have to do that!)

Sources for motifs used in this project (several motifs created by me on graph paper at end of pattern)
- Farm Doodles by Pacific Knits
- KnitOvation by Andrea Rangel
- Strange Brew by Tin Can Knits (also an excellent resource for designing stranded knit sweaters)
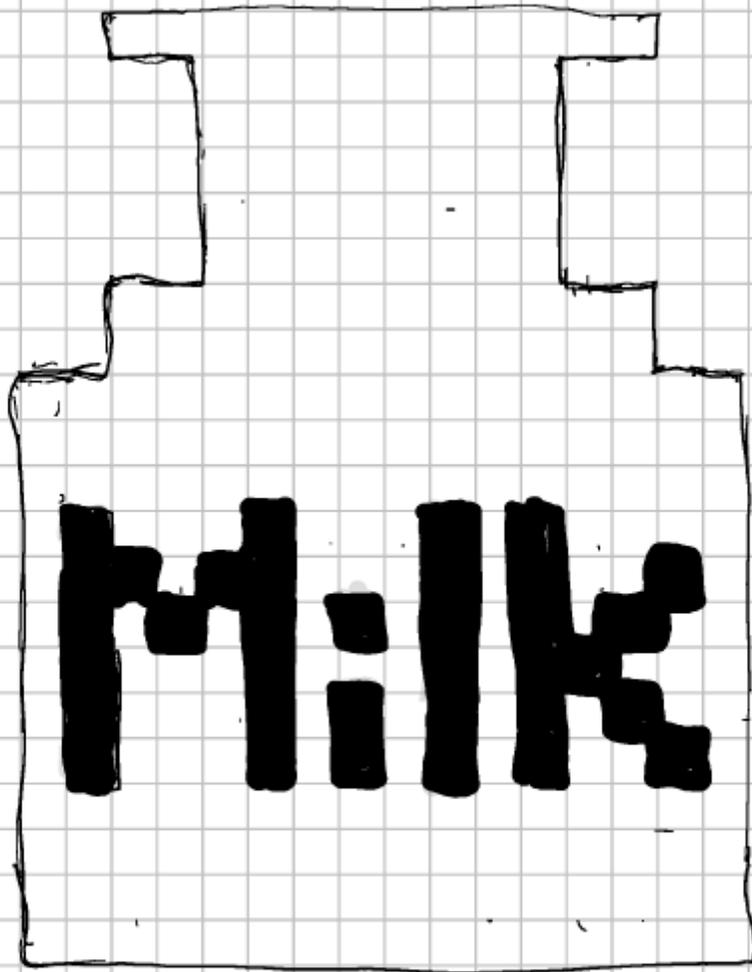
Contact Lisa Janice (LJ) Cohen
lisa@ljcohen.net
http://www.ljcohen.net (main website)
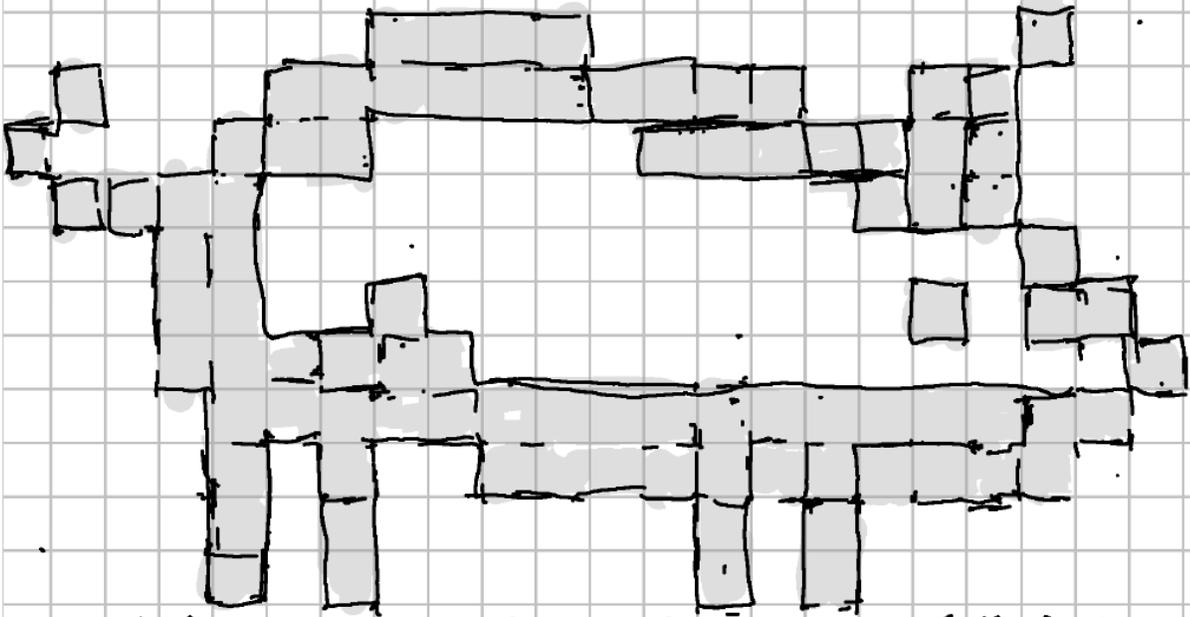http://www.starfieldfarm.com (has section with cow sweater process)

Special thanks to Judit Czobor and Marlene Reilly for their help in reviewing this pattern.

Milk bottle

■ ≡ Background color
□ ≡ Foreground color

PIG

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2
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4
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10
11

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Garden tools

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

TRACTOR