

Farm youth learns cultures of Switzerland

By Sally Blair
Farm Feature Writer

"Switzerland is a beautiful country with beautiful people," said Jane Alecxih with great enthusiasm. She was talking about her experiences this summer as a participant in the Youth for Understanding (YFU) international student exchange.

Jane, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter C. Alecxih, Lancaster R2, lived for nine weeks with a Swiss family and gained some real insight into the culture and the country.

The YFU program is financed through student fees, contributions and a grant from the State Department, and is designed "to promote better understanding and break-down stereotypes," Jane said. It has been operating since 1951 when the first German and Austrian students came to this country. It is a two-way exchange program and has both a two month summer program and a year long exchange. Ann Arbor, Michigan is the program's home base.

Eighteen-year-old Jane became interested in the program through a newspaper article, but the international visitors at her home also "influenced" her, she said. Her family hosted the International Farm Youth Exchange delegate to Lancaster County from Turkey last year and they have hosted foreign visitors frequently over the years.

She was one of the first in this area to participate in the program and received a scholarship to help pay the cost.

Jane lived with a family in central Switzerland in the small town of Spiez on Lake Thun, not far from the capital city Bern. Her host father was a German and English



Ringing up the cash register and assisting customers at Herr's is a part time job for Jane.

teacher at a Gymnasium, "a cross between our high school and college," and her mother was a librarian.

A host sister, Anne, 18, left for the United States two weeks before Jane did and is participating in the year-long YFU program in Minnesota. The two plan to meet during Anne's visit here. Jane said she is looking forward to seeing her host sister after she has a chance to experience life here.

There was another daughter in her host family, Regla, 21, who lived in her own apartment and taught school.

Jane called her host family "the nicest people" and characterized the Swiss people as being "unique and marvelous."

It was "so interesting," she said, because the people of Switzerland speak four languages - German, French, Italian and Romansch. She said, "The people who speak each language are different. But most of the people are like the people around here - sensible and solid. I found them very friendly."

Was the language a problem? "No," said Jane. "I spoke some German, but they spoke a Swiss-German dialect. Mostly we spoke English. I never had any problem. Almost everyone understands English."

In size, Switzerland is twice as big as New Jersey, and lies farther north than Pennsylvania. The landscape had many "rolling hills, like around here, but directly behind

Homestead Notes

the hills were the Alps. It was an adjustment to come home and see the hills but no Alps," Jane said.

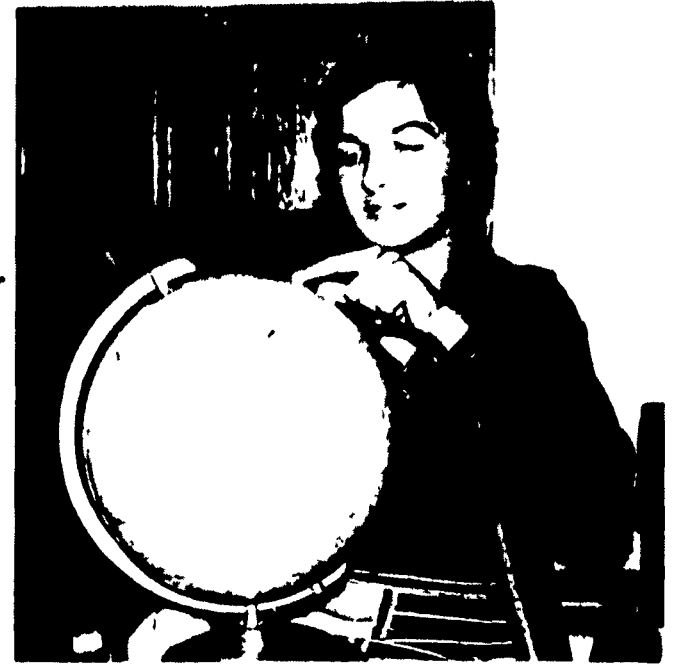
Jane had a lot of opportunity to see the entire country of Switzerland, because she traveled for nearly five of her nine weeks in the country. There was a two week family vacation to the Italian part of Switzerland, and one week she participated in a "studentwoche" through her host father's Gymnasium, during which the whole school had vacation and traveled to the French part of Switzerland. She was able to study music and German there.

She visited, on her own, an English-speaking school, L'Abri, also in the French part of the country and met many Americans studying there. And she had one fun week traveling with her host sister and other young people from school to "make a silent movie - a western about Sherlock Holmes." They camped out during the shooting of the film and she later viewed it and said, "It was a riot."

When she was at home with her family, Jane said, "I helped my host mother around the house, swam in the lake and went shopping or visited friends."

In their free time, Jane said, "My family read really a lot - books and magazines - everything. They also enjoyed going to the theater."

"There were many concerts in the community. There was a harp and oboe concert and a trumpet and organ concert. It was so interesting because the people really appreciated the arts. They showed so much respect -



Jane locates her host country on a globe, showing the lovely Switzerland where she spent nine weeks this summer.

nobody talked during the concerts," she said. "They were so intent. They really concentrated. And all kinds of people attended the concerts. Young people really enjoyed classical music. It was a very important aspect of their life."

The Swiss family also enjoyed discussing current events. Jane said her mother would often read something about the United States and then ask her if it was true or to explain it. One question dealt with slums. Jane said, "It was so hard to describe America because it is so big. I would try to explain that it is not like that everywhere. It really made me more aware of things."

She added, "The Swiss had a lot of stereotypes about the United States. They really think that every American is so wealthy. One reason they hold this opinion is that we have such big yards. My host family had no yard at all. Land there is so expensive."

According to Jane, a large dairy farm in that country would be one with 20 cows. She went on to say that while she was used to seeing huge cornfields, "everything there was on a smaller scale - tractors and cars were so small. In my first week I saw a lot of farm work being done by hand. Much grain was harvested by hand and carried on their backs in wicker baskets. I also saw a lot of horses working." All the land is put to use, she said, and even the steepest soil is used, mostly for vineyards.

"The Swiss really enjoyed the out-of-doors. They all have hiking boots, but I could barely keep up with my host father on our hikes. We went mountain climbing several times." They also enjoy skiing, but Jane said her family goes very seldom because "they hate crowds" and most slopes are filled with tourists and have become very expensive.

"We had no television," Jane said. For those who had sets, there are three channels, one speaking French, one Italian and one German, so the choice was rather limited.

Despite their official neutrality, the Swiss "really have opinions" about politics, Jane said. "They are especially interested in our country because they have a democracy too." One major difference, according to Jane, is that they rotate the presidency in four year terms from among elected representatives.

[Continued on Page 44]

Country Corner

Should farmers join the picket line?

By Melissa Piper

I just cannot help wondering what the average American consumer would say if the farmers decided to go on strike. In the past few weeks we've heard so much about other organizations, from football players to teachers, taking the "strike route" to increase their paychecks and improve working conditions. But what about the farmer who probably works longer and harder - what will his reward be?

I can picture the typical city dweller sitting down to a breakfast of scrambled eggs (oops - eggs have too much cholesterol - remember?) well let's make it artificial bacon and black coffee and picking up his morning paper with a jerk. While a banner headline declaring a farmer's strike might catch his attention, most papers, I'm afraid, would probably bury the story somewhere under the news of a new congressional investigation and the latest gory accident.

If the urbanite did find it and managed to take the time to read such a story, I wonder what his reaction would be. Most probably he'd shrug it off as non-essential for everyone knows that those "dumb" farmers, in the first place couldn't conceive of such an idea and in the second place they'd never be able to carry it off.

If however, he was slightly concerned, maybe he'd take time to think of some of the implications a farmer's strike could mean

No more food, no more fiber and no more milk - that in my estimation would be a pretty frightening thought.

Throughout the last few years we have seen some action by farmers to wake up the American



consumer to their plight of high production costs and low returns.

We've seen milk dumped into gutters, produce left to rot in the fields and calves slaughtered and dumped into pits. While those actions have brought

about some attention, it is usually only temporary without a lingering affect.

Therefore many American consumers fail to realize that the farmer, who faces 18-hour work days and rising production costs often receives a disproportionate return.

And despite his efforts to provide consumers, in this country and often abroad, with the best in wholesome products, he is constantly bombarded with barbs from the food industry that his pork and eggs are "too high" in cholesterol, growth hormones cause cancer and whole milk makes you fat. Frustrating - you bet!

There seems to be few solutions to the problem - at least that have worked. Advertising does help as does the farmer's attempts to sell directly to the consumer. Many farmer's associations have attempted to ease the problem by rearranging marketing but often find themselves stymied behind mountains of red tape.

While a national farmer's strike may never come about - we should all be concerned about the future of agriculture. One thing seems imminently inevitable and that is that farmers certainly can't go on providing the world with food and not receive a fair profit in return.

For in the words of a local Congressman, "He (the farmer) cannot be expected to grow increasing supplies of food only to take a loss on his labors."