

Julie Houck**A USDA inspector she protects the consumer**By Sally Bair
Feature Writer

Protecting the consumer is Julie Houck's job, and she works with a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm.

Julie, who lives at Gap RD1, is a federal food inspector for the United States Department of Agriculture and is assigned to the Victor F. Weaver Poultry Plant in New Holland.

In this era of the consumer, all food processing plants have federal inspectors whose job it is to be certain that the products are processed according to very exact federal standards. The whole purpose of the inspection process is to assure the consumer a quality product.

Julie puts it this way. "The main purpose of inspectors is to protect the consumer and make sure they get a wholesome product out of healthy animals." As she talked about her specific duties, she reiterated frequently that the consumer is being assured a quality product.

Being a federal food inspector is not so unusual in itself but Julie is a senior inspector with eight men working under her. She said supervising men offers no problem because "they respect you if you know your work." Julie herself is supervised by a veterinarian, a man.

Julie's workday often begins as early as 5:15 a.m. or 5:30 a.m. She is not required to be there until later, but she says she often goes in earlier "in order to do the job right. I don't like to be rushed." She admits that she works hard, but says, "Dedication is 50 percent of the job."

There are many specific jobs which she and the other inspectors perform regularly, ranging from doing an antemortem, which means observing the live birds in coops, to checking samples of carcasses for defects.

The quality assured product which is produced at Victor F. Weaver's for instance must comply with certain federal regulations. They have been licensed to meet certain standards and procedures, Julie explains, and the inspectors simply make sure this is what actually happens.

It is difficult for an outsider to comprehend the exact work of an inspector, but some specific instances point out the types of things they do in the course of a day. For in-



Julie checks breasts at the salvage table as part of her inspection work.

stance, sanitation is checked daily, and Julie is directly responsible for checking it thoroughly once a week. A moisture test is also taken once a day to make sure the poultry comply with regulations.

All equipment must be checked before it starts for the day. "Therefore I am always there before the men," Julie says.

At various times the inspectors take the temperatures of the birds and the water being used in processing - again there are specific standards. In her conversation Julie drops words like rpms, oscillation, AQL and drip-line speed. They may sound strange to an outsider, but Julie makes them sound quite reasonable and comprehensible.

As senior inspector one of Julie's jobs is to make sure there are always eight inspectors on the job. That means finding a replacement if someone calls in sick. Her work with the inspectors is "to monitor them and help with problems," she says. The veterinarian checks out questions raised by the inspectors, and Julie says that in her position she works with management on problems which crop up.

Despite the activities of actual inspection work, Julie also spends "a lot of time on paperwork. In fact she estimates about 20 percent of the work is paper work."

Julie is a native of nearby Chester County where she was born and raised on a general farm. She began working in a poultry plant as a trimmer, and then became a food inspector on a parttime basis. The training she got was "on-the-job." Then she said, "I took the civil service

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test for full-time employment as an inspector and was in the right place at the right time."

She said she made the move from poultry plant work to inspector basically because "it paid better." But, she added, "It was fulltime - I was helping the consumer and I needed the steady work."

She has been an inspector for three years but was elevated to her present position in August. Early in 1975 Julie was awarded the Federal Women's Award, which is given "to a woman doing outstanding work in her field." Julie was nominated by her supervisor and was one of just three women in the area to be nominated. The award carries with it a cash prize of \$200 and a plaque.

Julie received formal training in her work at a school in Texas which she attended for a week. There was both book work and lab work, and she was graded on her performance.

She is a member of the American Federation of Government Employees which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO and is chairman of the union representatives. She is also secretary of the safety committee.

Julie has been married for six years to Ross Houck, whom she met on a blind date. She praises him a lot as she talks about her "crazy" schedule. "I couldn't possibly work this way if it weren't for my husband. I give him a lot of credit. He always pitches in if I get behind." They have one son, Ross, Jr., who is in kindergarten.

Julie is no stranger to hard work. When she was a teenager, her father was injured and could no longer work. At 16 she worked as a waitress to earn extra money, and she worked as a library aide in the Neighborhood Youth Corps for three years during her high school years. She is a 1969 graduate of Coatesville Area High School. She attends Meadville Mennonite Church.



Julie plays with one of her English setters.

Although she is a very active homemaker during her off duty hours, Julie describes herself as "an outside person." She said she loves outdoor sports - baseball and volleyball, and plays outside with her son. She also expressed her belief in being physically fit, and has an exercise program which she does daily.

And Julie is one wife who doesn't mind when hunting season comes - she goes along. She said she really enjoys small game hunting and deer hunting. But she draws the line at going to deer camp with her husband - "I don't think that a camp is a place for a woman. I like to hunt with my family." She added that when she hunts deer she wants "one with antlers or none at all."

She said, "My father influenced me with my hunting. I used to help him skin his game." She has shot squirrels, rabbits and pheasants and says, "With the price of food it is only good economy to serve those animals in the family meals. If you learn the trick of cooking game you get really good results."

A pride of hers is a 1917 Springfield given her by her father. Her husband does woodwork and redid the stock on the gun.

Julie says she does a lot of cooking in the evenings, and says, "I love to cook, but basically simple and the old way. I like experimenting with food. But I cook everything from scratch."

She may be an outside person, but she has some very inside hobbies. "I do a little bit of crocheting and I help do quilting. I make flower arrangements and I love to read."

A very special interest of Julie's is raising English setters who also help with the hunting.

Julie has several long-range plans about her work and where it might lead her. First of all she says she hopes to get experience in different areas of federal food inspection, perhaps with red meats. Another area which

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Country Corner

Pa. FFA'ers receive nat'l honors

By Melissa Piper

A number of young people from all over the nation will be heading toward the center of the country this week to participate in the National FFA Convention. And while they represent many different areas of agriculture and agribusiness, the one main interest they have in common is the Future Farmers of America organization.

The convention is held annually in Kansas City, Missouri, and offers a full slate of judging events, public speaking contests and agricultural competitions. State teams which have been previously selected for outstanding performances compete against one another for prizes and national recognition.

But beyond the competition, the convention annually offers some of the best and most inspiring speakers in the United States. Last year for example, Gerald Ford, the president of the United States, addressed the youths as a keynote speaker.

This year Nelson Rockefeller, the vice-president of the United States and Johnnie Bench, the noted football player, along with the Honorable John

Conally will be heading the list of speakers for the FFA'ers.

Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of the convention however, is the presentation of national awards. Those young people receiving the proficiency, chapter, and community service awards realize their efforts throughout the year or years by receiving the honored recognitions.

Since the beginning of the Convention 48 years ago, Pa. has always been well represented at the national event. Over the years, many chapters and individuals from the state have received outstanding national awards for their projects and community service.

Receiving national awards for their chapter's community service projects under the Building Our American Community program this year are Northern Lebanon High School with a Silver Emblem and Cloister Chapter, Ephrata with a bronze award.

Seven youths from the southeastern portion of Pa. will also be receiving their American Farming

degrees in Kansas City. These FFA'ers have earned at least \$1000 by their own efforts in agriculture or agribusiness and must have demonstrated outstanding abilities in leadership and community activities. Only one tenth of one percent of the FFA membership is selected for the degree.

FFA'ers in Lancaster Farming's prime coverage area receiving the American Farming Degree are: Richard Kurtz, Elverson (Berks Co.); Greg Landis, Millersville (Lancaster Co.); Alan Miller, Red Lion, (York Co.); Rick Pfautz, Ephrata, (Lancaster Co.); Gary Stauffer, New Holland, (Lancaster Co.); Frank Stoltzfus, Elverson (Berks Co.) and Larry Wenger, Myerstown (Lebanon Co.).

If agriculture is to have a future then it certainly lies in the hands of young people such as these. Their efforts and service to agriculture and the community certainly deserves national recognition. As Pennsylvanians' we should be quite proud of these FFA members and the contributions they have made in keeping agriculture alive and well in this state.