

# Farm wife is herdswoman for Long Meadows Farm

By JUDY MITCHELL  
Berks Co. Reporters

HAMBURG - A quick profile on Helene Dreisbach of Hamburg RI would seem to describe any number of farm women: She is a wife, a mother, a great cook; and she is very much involved in the family farm and other farm related activities. Helene has a vitality and an outgoing personality, however, that invite a closer look; and when I decided to interview her recently, some of those same facts were

revealed in a slightly altered light.

Until about six years ago, Helene, who is married to Veterinarian Robert Dreisbach, was not a farm wife. Explaining how the family came to move to Berks County, she told me that Bob had had a "thriving veterinary practice" in Montgomery County but regretted attending fewer and fewer farm animals. Also, the Dreisbach's prefer country living, and their seven-acre property in Landsdale where they kept

a few horses for riding had become hemmed in by apartments and housing developments. That explains their decision to move, but their reason for buying a farm centers around a cow named "Lullaby."

Helene told me that when they first bought the Longmeadows Farm, which is located near Yoder Heights just outside of West Hamburg, her husband was fond of telling visiting friends about this extravagantly expensive cow he owned. Introducing them to Lullaby, he would tell how she earned the title of "the \$100,000 cow." It all began, as he would tell the story, when Helene got him a heifer calf one year for Christmas. Naturally then, they had to get other cows to keep Lullaby company. As Lullaby and her companions continued to freshen and have heifers of their own, he finally had to buy a farm to put them on, and then equipment to grow their feed, and so on . . .

Helene admits that Bob's joke tells the story pretty much as it happened. She did get him the heifer for Christmas; they were subsequently keeping a few milking cows and heifers at Walabe Farms in Collegeville; and their small herd did eventually grow "to the point that they would have to either sell them or buy a farm."

The Dreisbachs' first few years of farming, as Helene remembers them, were not exactly easy ones. Bob was faced with building a new veterinary practice, and on top of the cost of the farm itself, there was a lot of dairy



Helene Dreisbach is greeted by one of the family's Brown Swiss cows during a trip to the meadow. The animal was a recent addition to the herd at Long Meadows Farm.

equipment and farm machinery to be purchased. They were accustomed to the work involved with the cows so "the dairy operation did not give us any problems," she recall, "but the field work did." Six years later, however, they seem to be managing quite well. The dairy herd has grown to include 52 registered Jerseys on test and another 50 heifers and young bulls. A good portion of their 100 acre farm is used for pasture land and crop growing, and they rent another 80 acres for their crop production which includes corn, silage and hay.

Running a successful veterinary practice is a full-time business, and the Dreisbach's only employ one full-time hired hand for the farm operation. Helene, however, lends more than a helping hand around the farm. She is actually the herds woman for Longmeadows Farm, responsible for about 85 percent of the milking and all the record keeping for the herd. Bob has a little more free time now that he has taken on a young veterinarian to help with his practice, and in addition to the health and feeding of the herd, he tends to the planting and field work. The

arrangement, according to Helene, suits both she and her husband quite well. "What Bob really likes to do," she told me, "is go out about six in the morning and plow. It really relaxes him." As for Helene, she is obviously enthusiastic about the dairy business and particularly enjoys choosing the sires and keeping the records.

Considering the extent of her involvement with the family farm operation, I was surprised to learn that Helene was not raised on a farm. She majored in agriculture in college primarily because of her interest in horses. At the time, she was showing Morgans, training horses, and giving riding lessons. Her first introduction to cows was at college, and it seems that she was hooked almost immediately. "I liked the idea of the animal working for me for a change, instead of the other way around," she told me. The Dreisbach's herd is one of only three registered Jersey herds in the County, and Helene is a confirmed Jersey fan. "Some people think that all milk is created equal," she said, "but that is really not true. Jerseys produce a very high quality, high solids

milk and do it very efficiently." She admits that her opinion seems to be a minority one in this area, but she is not one to hold back on something she feels strongly about.

Producing a couple of hefty volumes of DHIR and OPC records, Helene pointed out that she finds the records to be the most fascinating part of dairying. She is quite proud of the herd's performance which last year averaged 10,853 pounds of milk and 558 pounds of butterfat. Choosing the sire and then comparing a cow's production with that of her offspring, she explained, "usually tells you that you have either bred up or down. If I was just milking, if I was not involved with trying to get better, I wouldn't be happy." She went on to add, "Some people think that you have to keep getting bigger and bigger. We don't really want to get bigger, just better."

Helene's competency with animal records came in handy recently when she and Bob got involved in preparing the catalogue of consignments for the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Sale. Bob is chairman of the sale which will take place at the

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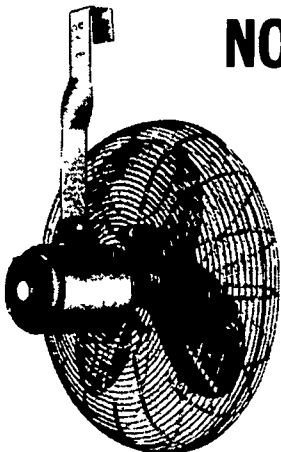
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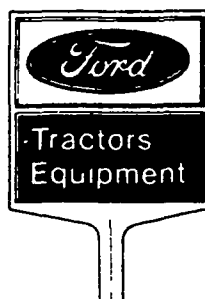
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