

Franklin couple pitches in for American Farm Project



Barbara and Robert Woods of Fannettsburg are one of the 18 core couples that began in the American Farm Project now in its third and final year.

BY RUTH ANN BENEDICT
Staff Correspondent

FANNETTSBURG -- "You are involved directly. You lead their discussion and help bring out their feelings. These feelings are what are most important."

These were the words of Robert and Barbara Woods of Fannettsburg when they spoke of the programs and people they are involved with in the American Farm Project.

As they sat in their cozy farmhouse nestled along Rt. 75 in the Path Valley of Franklin County, with their youngest of eight children close by, it was evident that the Woods', one of the 18 core farm couples in the American Farm Project, value highly their rural community setting, their roots, and the agricultural American way of living.

Outside the rain fell steadily. Inside a wood stove was burning, making the

damp and chill vanish with its warm friendly glow.

The stone wall behind the stove was built with rocks, picked off of the Woods' own fields.

Yes, it was apparent that rural America was of great importance to the Woods. Perhaps for that very reason alone, they became involved in the American Farm Project because rural America is what it's all about.

There is much enthusiasm in Barbara's voice as she speaks and her enthusiasm is well founded for Barbara was involved in the preplanning stages of the Project.

The project undertakes the responsibility of stressing a humanitarian viewpoint towards agricultural community issues. The Projects' four themes — land, rural image, rural people & community, and economics — educates and brings to light the deep rooted feelings of both city and rural people. The project enables them to look across the fence to the other side and recognize how the other half lives.

Barbara recalled the day Victor Ray, the National Farmers Union's Director of the Department of Field Services, called her to talk over program ideas.

"Victor Ray knew that I was interested in educating people in the humanities and in agricultural America, Barbara said.

"We got together, exchanged ideas and Victor asked if Bob and I would be interested in being in the Project. We eagerly agreed."

Victor Ray and the National Farmers Union applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the planning grant.

The National Endowment for the Humanities had funded metropolitan historical museums and opera houses stressing the humanities, but it had never

funded a project for farm communities.

In August of 1977, the grant of \$38,000 was awarded. The foundation of the American Farm Project had begun.

Early in 1978, the Project grant of \$150,000 was approved and eighteen core farm couples, plus one humanist and one of the Farmers Union staff per couple, gathered for the first time at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota.

Southwest State was the first rural college institution to be re-programmed with a rural theme in rural humanities, instead of the sciences.

At Southwest State, the core group attended a weeklong folk festival to introduce them to the humanities.

The rest of the time was spent in training seminars during which staff members at Southwest State presented programs on the four Project themes.

"We were shown different ways to get groups we were working with to let out their feelings on the issues we presented." And, as the Woods said before, these feelings are what are most important.

Some of the groups they have worked with are the Fannett-Metal High School, Path Valley Lions Club, Farmers Union Youth Camp (second to twelfth grade), Farmers Union national Convention and the Path Valley Young Farmers Association.

At the Farmers Union Youth Camp, Barbara and Robert presented a slide set paralleling the lives of city children to farm and rural area children.

Barbara said she remembered one child in particular stated after the presentation that he was glad that he lived on a farm. When asked why this youngster stated "because I know how to work".

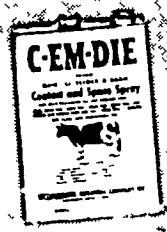
This program presenting the cross-section of lives.

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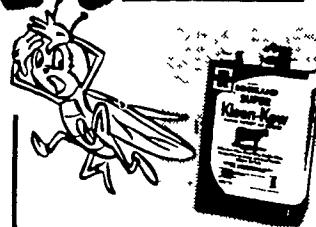


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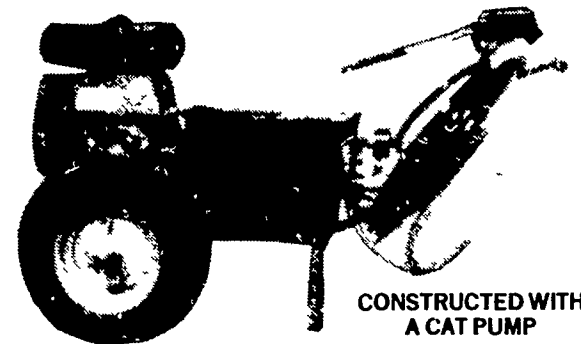
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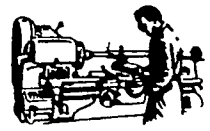
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