

# Joyce Trapp is dedicated to agriculture

By SALLY BAIR  
Staff Correspondent

UNIVERSITY PARK - Joyce Trapp is a successful Wisconsin dairy farmer. That in itself is not unusual because Wisconsin is known for its successful dairy farmers. But Joyce Trapp and her husband Roger are unique because they are first-generation dairy farmers who chose to go into farming without having been raised on farms.

Four and a half years ago Joyce was the wife of a truck driver and stock car racer whose dream just happened to be to own a dairy farm. Now she considers herself a full-fledged dairy farmer and she has become an enthusiastic spokesman for agriculture.

She is quick to admit that there are many things to learn when you were not raised on a farm, and Joyce gives a lot of credit to the farmer cooperatives in her area which offered advice. Her realization of the contributions of cooperatives to agriculture is the reason she was at Penn State recently as a speaker at the National Institute on Cooperative Education.

Since they moved to the farm, Joyce says she has learned more than in all 16 years in school. "Farming is big business, and it doesn't change your lifestyle to being more quiet. I'm glad to have the experience - it helped me grow more." One reason for buying the farm was to slow down, which the Trapps soon learned is just a phrase and has no relation to what one does on a busy dairy farm.

In an interview prior to her talk, Joyce said she tells her audience that the female cooperative member is "dynamite," with the potential of "exploding" in the areas of loyalty, education, member awareness, community awareness and public relations.

A member of the Wisconsin Women for Agriculture and American Agri-Women, Joyce feels strongly that farm wives must be professional in their attitudes toward the public. She said, "We need to promote and project a good-looking, professional image. Even if pressed for time, I feel women should take a few minutes to comb their hair before going to town. They will be treated as a professional and they will feel important."

For a woman who did not live on the farm five years ago, Joyce is a very strong supporter of agriculture, and admits to getting "comments" about her outspoken role. For those who question why a newcomer is speaking up, Joyce said she simply encourages them to join her and also speak up for agriculture. She said she recognizes her position as an outsider in her rural community, and that she will probably always be considered an outsider.

"But the reason I'm giving this speech is that I want to generate the same kind of spirit and the same kind of feeling that I've got. This must spring up from the members. They must want to do it themselves. The more women I send out to speak to others, the better it will be," she states positively.

She is especially happy to talk about cooperatives because of their help in getting started in farming. "The local managers were great. Since they know the area they're the best for advice. I found out how fantastic cooperatives are. I really got excited about cooperatives," Joyce said.

Joyce is sincere then she says she thinks exciting things are happening in cooperatives and that their story should be told to the media. "Cooperatives are an untapped potential. I wonder why agriculture has a corner on the cooperative way of doing business."

Joyce feels cooperative members have a responsibility to tell the cooperative story in a positive way. "We must let people know that we are a business of equal value to the hardware store," she states.

The Trapps are now milking 68 cows on 260 acres. She said proudly. "We can each do every single job." The one job she does solo is record-keeping. Their two sons, ages 16 and 13, are also active on the farm.

As she reflects on their decisions to go into dairying, Joyce says, "It was kind of unrealistic to go into it in a big way. We had two advantages - we were older and we had \$35,000 in cash." The advantages did not make the way easy, however. The Trapps were turned down by both the Federal Land Bank and the Farmers Home Administration. Joyce says, "They turned us down because of inexperience, not because of money."

They finally got the farm, because, as Joyce puts it, "We found two people with confidence in us. A retired farmer left money in the farm - he took the risk - and Production Credit Association gave us the money because we convinced the man with our enthusiasm."

She admits thoughtfully, "There are times when we think it was not the right thing to do and wonder if we can keep up." She says right now she and her husband are considering if they should stay in dairying, primarily because of two injuries he suffered which make it difficult to do the milking. No matter what the decision on dairying, however, she says firmly they will stay in agriculture. And she remembers, "People said we'd never make it."

Two years after going into operation with 40 cows, they expanded to 60 cows, and although the paperwork and delays were a horror story, the Trapps were successful in refinancing for the additional cows and facilities. By the time the loan was through, they needed eight more cows just to pay the increase in interest payment.

The whole emotional experience of getting financial backing to go into farming has left Joyce with some vague uncertainties about the future of agriculture. "I think agriculture is terrific, but I think the family farm system could be in danger. I worry that we shouldn't close



A first generation dairy farmer, Joyce Trapp is dedicated to bringing promoting agriculture and ag

cooperatives.

agriculture to people who weren't born into it," she says. In her opinion it is almost impossible to get started unless breaks are given to family members.

The Trapps are members of multiple cooperatives including AMPI, CENEX, Equity Livestock Marketing, Midwest Breeders and Midland Cooperatives.

Joyce first became enthusiastic when she attended a cooperative couples program, and has remained a strong supporter. She is proud that her cooperative has begun a tradition of holding one meeting a year with board

members and young couples so young members can have a voice. Although she lost in a bid for a seat on the board, she is anxious to work to change the structure to make it easier for others to be elected. "I guess I'd be honored to be on a Board of Directors, but I don't want to run again," she says.

Presently Joyce is involved in preparing a slide presentation for use in elementary schools on cooperatives. The project is one of a series being carried out by her local Wisconsin Women in Agriculture chapter. They have already prepared one on dairy products and are working on one about meats. The slide program is 10 minutes long and she or other local members are on hand to answer questions generated by the program. She is proud of the work her group, and others throughout the state and nation, is doing and says she enjoys the stimulation of being with women who are committed to promoting agriculture.

Her commitment, despite the hardships she has encountered, remains strong. Joyce says, "I am convinced that agriculture is the base of the American economy. We are the best ag-producing nation in the world and we must stay there. We need really good spokespeople to tell our story or we will lose our support."

For Joyce Trapp, telling the story of her newfound way of life is important and vital. She intends to do her part to keep the agricultural traditions strong.

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