

Vicki Rice puts heart into hogs



Vicki Rice, of R7 Lebanon, changed careers from dental assistant to farmer. She keeps up-to-date on the hog industry through reading and through the efforts of the Purina representatives.



"I love the baby pigs," comments Vicki. The Rices also have 5 Appaloosa horses, 20 head of cattle, 6 dogs, and numerous cats.



Vicki and Ken Rice are proud to be farmers and hog producers and aren't afraid to let everybody know.

BY SHEILA MILLER
LEBANON — "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" is a question that is tempting to ask Vicki Rice of R7 Lebanon.

Vicki, like many women today, has taken an active role in farming — with hogs being her realm in the agribusiness world.

Stepping inside her office located in the Rice's new farrowing barn constructed in the Spring of 1979, you can't help but wonder why this 5'7½" tall young woman, who looks more like a fashion model than a farmer, has so much interest in the swine industry.

Vicki strolls past a poster of her favorite television puppet star, Miss Piggy, and dips her boots into a pan of disinfectant before she opens the door to the unit.

Muttering how she needs to invest in a pair of boots without holes, she proceeds into her pork production house. She tells how she and her husband Kenneth got started in the hog business just three years ago and have progressed to the point where they were recognized nationally by the Ralston Purina Company in their newsletter to producers last month.

Actually, the Rices stumbled into the swine industry almost accidentally. Although the two of them grew up in Lancaster County, neither one of them grew up on a farm.

After they were married, Ken began his career with the Lebanon Bell Telephone Company, while Vicki spent 13 years working as a dental assistant for Dr. Roy K. Yeager in Latitz.

In 1973, the couple purchased 15 acres of land in South Lebanon Township, most of which was wooded. The following year found them building their home and putting up a barn for their Appaloosa horses.

"Ken always wanted a farm," says Vicki, "And I always refused to be a farmer's wife.

"But, soon after we moved in, Ken decided to raise a calf, so we bought one and raised it. Now we have about 20 head of Polled Herefords and Angus.

"Then one day a pig walked into our lives — he just wandered in from the woods."

Thus exploring porker was none other than 'Arnold', 45 pounds of curiosity. He

managed to snort his way into the Rice's hearts and stayed there until he weighed about 300 pounds.

"He was just like a dog," explains Vicki, confessing Arnold was more of a pet than a pig. Everything was going fine for Arnold until one day he mistakenly tangled with another Rice pet, the Dalmatian dog, Butch.

Recalling her first marketing lesson, Vicki admits there were a few tears shed for Arnold who "was sold and became pork chops — but not for us."

After Arnold and their first taste of the swine industry, the Rices developed an appetite to pursue a career in farming.

"We studied different types of operations that would work on a small acreage and that could eventually be financially supporting for both of us to stay home," Vicki explain. She adds that since she was the one who was selected to stay home in the first round, she opted for pigs over chickens.

Now, Vicki is in charge of their farrowing operation set up with 130 Landrace x Yorkshire sows farrowing continuously.

Her complete operation is under one roof. The gestation and breeding portion is one big area of the building, with the farrowing area and nursery located in separate wings.

The entire house is equipped with gravity flow manure gutters that carry all the manure to a holding pond outside. These gutters are flushed once a week, says Vicki as she demonstrates how easy it is to just open the plug and let it flow. A neighboring farmer uses the manure and takes care of pumping out the holding pond, she says.

Vicki tells how the sows in the gestation area are all on individually controlled rations with individual waterers. They doze lazily on their sides, oblivious to the visitors.

Walking back the aisle to the breeding area Vicki explains how her breeding program calls for Duroc x Hampshire crossbred boars to service her sows, resulting in the optimum four-way cross.

"I hand breed the sows twice to different boars," says Vicki. She points out that the boar is selected that best fits the size of the sow. The most recent addition to their boar inventory is an 8-month-old named Honeybunch — he'll be servicing her younger sows.

When asked if she has any trouble catching the sows that are in heat, Vicki leans on the railings of the breeding pens and studies the boars who are roaming behind the crated sows.

"After the pigs are weaned off the sows, I stress them to bring them into heat faster," says Vicki. "I put one boar in with three sows and I leave them together for three days.

"During those three days, they're fed only twice — on two mornings. They have to fight for feed, so all that pushing and shoving stresses them and brings them in heat on the fourth or fifth day



Not for those with weak stomachs — Vicki handles the injections and tail dockings, along with the castrating chores.



Handling the boars is no problem, says Vicki. Most of them like to have their backs scratched, like her newest born "Honeybunch".

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