

# Farm woman speaks up for farm organizations

BY SALLY BAIR  
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"I think agriculture is changing and people have started to realize that farms are necessary and important, and have become more concerned about the problems of farmers."

These are the words of Naomi Spahr, one Lancaster County farm woman who believes in speaking up for what she believes in - agriculture and the family farm.

She expresses her beliefs through her involvement in several farm organizations, and although she and her husband J. Robert moved off their dairy farm about a year and a half ago, she finds herself more interested and involved than ever. She explains it by saying she has more time to participate now than when she lived on the farm. They now reside at 2848 Litz Pike, Neffsville.

Farming is still her number one interest since her husband and son James are farming in partnership. And she adds, "In the busy season I help out in the field." Naomi grew up on a dairy farm and for the 32 years they have been married she has been involved in farming.

Explaining why she speaks out on agricultural issues and why she feels other farm women should, Naomi says, "For too long we have been willing to take whatever they gave us. We need a profit to continue. Men can do a good job as well as women, but they don't have the time. Women take an interest in their business and know the ins and outs as well as a man. As long as women know what they're talking about and can make people understand about farming they can do a good job."

She added that she thinks women are getting involved younger, which may be a reflection of young people farming on their own at an earlier age.

Naomi said she'd like to see more farm wives become active in organizations like Penns Agri-Women, a group which she helped found. She is also a member of its national counterpart, American Agri-Women, and she is enthusiastic about the educational thrusts of the programs of the two organizations.

With American Agri-Women holding its convention in Hershey this past week, Naomi became involved in planning and organization of the program. Speaking before the event, she said, "I'm excited to see things fall into place. We have an excellent program planned, and I'm waiting to see the others' reactions. It is basically an educational convention so we keep favors to a minimum."

One of the few hobbies she has is caring for her "jungle" as she refers to an area of her living room which features a great many plants.



There is one day of touring, the Naomi worked closely with tour committee chairman Marian Brenneman working out the details of the tour to Lancaster County for the approximately 200 people.

Naomi pointed out that farmers' wives across the country have a lot in common, despite the differences in individual operations. "A lot of times we talk prices when we're together," she states.

At one convention, Naomi and her husband became friendly with a farm couple from Washington state who couldn't believe that they could make a living on the 70 acres they were farming at this time. Naomi said, they found that we've learned to use every little corner - it's our Dutch heritage."

She recalls that Penn's Agri-Women got its start on the trip home from an American Agri-Women convention in Kansas City. She was traveling with York Countians Ethel Gross and Gail MacPherson and Naomi relates, "We thought maybe we should start a chapter in Pennsylvania." They did, and she credits Gail and Ethel with the success of the fielding organization.

"It is a coalition of women from other farm organizations. Our goal is to strive for something we all

feel is important and to come to a common interest and need. We all work together," Naomi relates.

She said they plan to look at larger issues in farming, and get involved in them "even though something may not be our own problem. We would work to help others," she states.

The organization, formed in 1977, is in its fourth year, but is not growing by leaps and bounds. Naomi says, "It's hard to keep growing. A lot of people think it is just one more meeting to attend. Many farm women haven't found out what we're all about. It's not just what one person wants. We work together. I would like to see more women interested in it."

A member of Farmers Union, Naomi pointed out that Penns Agri-Women boasts members from each of the major agricultural organizations in Pennsylvania.

The Spahrs have been members of the National Farmers Union for a time which Naomi describes as "long already." Although it is not as high in membership as some others, Naomi says, "I like Farmer's Union because women are not an auxiliary, but are a part of it. We go to the state convention as delegates, we have some women as county presidents and we have had some attend the national convention as delegates

"We like their policies. We worked very hard for the milk security fund."

Naomi is secretary-treasurer of the Lancaster County unit and a member of their legislative committee.

She says she enjoys very much working on the policy of the Farmers Union with legislators and others. "I'm still learning, but you do feel you have some say in the system. We discuss different aspects of things."

Naomi thinks it's fine that there are so many different organizations with differing viewpoints. "This is the way it should be. If we can discuss and can understand each other a little better, the outlook will be better," she says.

She stresses how important she feels it is for farmers to be informed of what happens around them. "They need to know what is happening with their zoning boards. I often attend meetings just to listen and to know what's happening."

How does Naomi keep up with the issues and form opinions? She said, "I read a lot of different publications."

Naomi admits to having mixed feelings about the land use question. "I am concerned about agricultural districts. What will happen when the farmer really doesn't want to be in it? We need a way to keep land in farming, but I don't know how to do it."

She pointed out that Farmers Union policy advocates working at the problem through inheritance taxes and capital gains taxes, much like the suggested Haverstick plan. While acknowledging that she feels this plan has

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Naomi Spahr looks over the minute book of the National Farmers Union, an organization in which both she and her husband J. Robert are active. This farm woman believes in being involved in agricultural issues.

## Homestead Notes