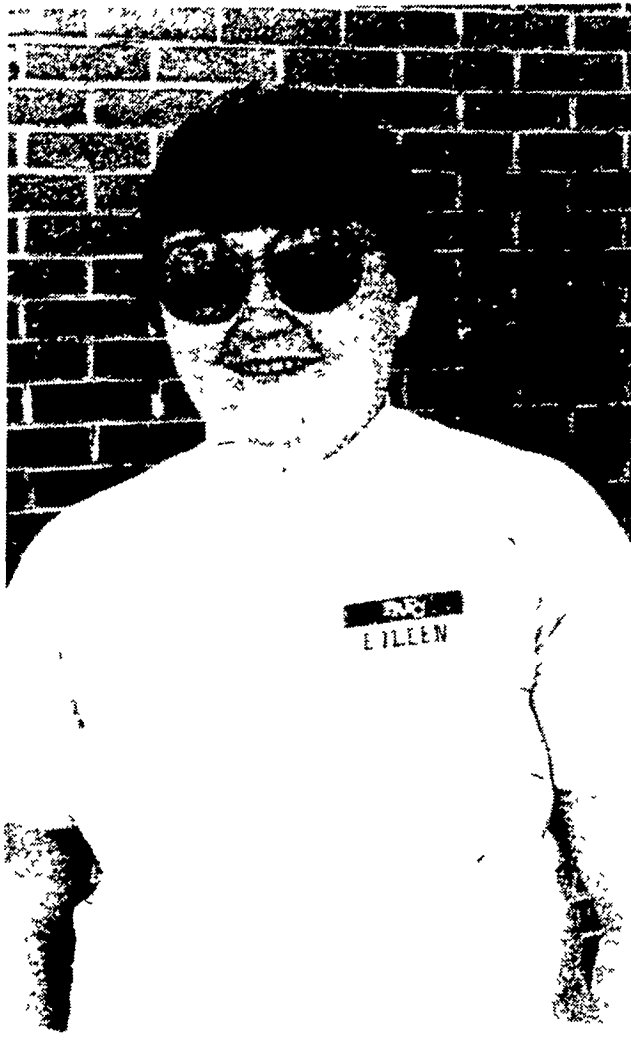


Janice Burkholder



Eileen Green



Jane Benner

## Farm wives talk on their differing roles

BY SALLY BAIR  
Staff Correspondent

Managing a modern farming operation takes a combination of intelligence, drive, determination and faith. In many operations the most valuable asset is the farm wife — that rare combination of homemaker, mother, tractor-driver, egg-gatherer, cow-milker, gardener and go-fer. Her support and help are an invaluable contribution to the success of the farm.

But what is right for one woman may not work for another and each farm wife must find her own place in the enterprise if the marriage and the farming business are to be happy.

At the recent Pennsylvania Association of Farmer Cooperatives' Co-op Couples Conference, three Pennsylvania farm wives shared their feelings and discussed the way they support the farming operations of which they are a part. Each of these women is fully involved in her husband's work, but each has a different responsibility.

To Janice Burkholder, involvement in her husband's partnership with his father means keeping records. Having worked as a secretary, she feels recordkeeping not only keeps her in touch with her previous career but is also an invaluable aid in their farming operation.

Janice's records, however, do not just include bills, milk checks, calf registrations and other expenditures involved with the farm. She also keeps a complete budget for both the farm and her household, and she knows exactly where every penny is spent. She admits, "I thrive on paper work. I love to know where the money goes."

Her husband, Stan, is a Franklin County dairy farmer and together with his father, farms over 400 acres and milks 125 dairy cows which average 19,300 pounds of milk and 690 pounds of fat.

While her father-in-law had previously kept all farm records, Janice states, "We gradually took over the bookwork so we know what's going on. Most major decisions my father-in-law lets up to us."

Janice writes all the checks for the partnership but they are signed by either her husband or father-in-law so that they see what's going

out or coming in. She points out that since partnerships are not eligible for the NOW banking accounts they keep their checking account balance as low as possible. She said her family feels some of the easiest earned money is paying bills on time so as not to be faced with interest payments. They also keep a close watch on interest rates at the bank and on money market certificates.

Another of Janice's specific jobs is to write the numbers for brucellosis testing and for classification. She also takes care of calf registration, saying, "My husband feels it saves him a lot of hours."

Above and beyond the usual bookwork, Janice also figures a monthly budget and estimates what kind of income they can expect. This includes trying to estimate how many cows may be culled (using DHIA records as a guide), and whether there will be any major machinery investments needed. "We try to figure out the milk price and see how much short or how much left over there will be," Janice states.

In addition to farm records, Janice says, "I make up a cash flow for personal expenses, and we each draw a check from the partnership once a month." In her expense book she records every penny spent according to categories she has established, such as car, clothing, tithes, recreation and others. At the end of each month she totals the expenditures and compares it with previous months. "It's a good way to keep expenses down," she says. "Every time I come home from shopping I get out my budget book."

While some may find this a drudgery, for Janice it is a joy and she likes working hard at the records. She feels she is doing an important job. "It makes me feel like I'm really helping more."

The Burkholders are active in dairy promotion and in the Holstein Club. Janice adds, "We believe in the spiritual development of the family and are active in the Church Sunday School and youth group." They have two children, ages 5 and 7.

Janice concluded, "I thoroughly enjoy being part of the farm. I'm proud of Stan. He refers to me as his own personal secretary."

Eileen Green is an integral part

of her family's dairy and poultry operation in Bradford County. Her husband Gary and his brother have had a partnership for five years, with 42 registered Holsteins and 12,000 laying hens.

Eileen says, "I don't get too involved in the barn unless his brother is away. I don't know how to milk." She does know how to feed and do other chores when needed.

"I work mostly in the poultry house," Eileen says. The Greens get about 11,000 eggs in peak times, and they are gathered by hand on flats of 30 eggs each. Another adult and two children work with Eileen and she estimates, "It takes about an hour daily. 'It is not hard.'"

In addition to the physical labor of gathering eggs, Eileen is responsible for all the bookwork, including the writing of all the checks. She says she enjoys this work, and it should be a natural since she also works three days a week in a bank, from 8:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. She says, "The hours are convenient."

Eileen and Gary had lived off the farm for seven years before going into the partnership with his brother. She readily admits, "It takes a lot of adjusting." She said it was a real shock to get \$2,000 feed bills, and despite substantial backing from her father-in-law, there was a "terrible debt load."

Nevertheless, having lived both on and off the farm with a young family, Eileen says, "Farm life is a great life for kids. They have a lot more respect for people." The Greens have two daughters, 14 and 7.

Both partners in the Green operation have their own outside activities, with one brother being active in Dairy Herd Improvement and the other in cooperatives. Eileen says, "They both have an equal amount of time. Being in a partnership is a big help because we can cover for each other."

Eileen said she feels a positive attitude is important in a successful operation, keeping the attitude that it will work for you. She is especially appreciative of opportunities which get young farm couples together, saying, "It is helpful because you think you are the only one with all the problems. It is good to share experiences and learn about other set-ups."

She adds, "I feel the wife should

be involved even if she works off the farm and whether or not she does chores. She should know what's going on."

Jane Benner is a full time working partner with her husband Ken in their 60 cow dairy herd in Perry County. Jane, who is a soft-spoken southerner from Virginia, was raised on a dairy farm there and studied dairy science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Jane milks the cows with Ken, feeds the calves on her own and can be found just as much in the field as in their home. She wants it that way, and says of Ken, "I appreciate my husband's healthy attitude toward my participation." She also does the bookkeeping for the operation.

Jane is optimistic about young people going into farming, something she and Ken did on their own 10 years ago. She acknowledges the difficult times, but advises, "The sooner you get on your own the better off you will be. Then you can work together as a family. It worked for us. You must have the guts to do it."

She is a firm believer in getting experience by working for someone away from home before going into farming, however. She says it gives young people the opportunity to prove their integrity and to show that they can meet their financial obligations. It also gives them time to come up with a realistic management plan.

In any family arrangement, Jane says, "You must be 100 percent sure it's going to work, and you must make sure a family deal will be fair. A farmer will lose his most valuable resource - his wife - if the family deal doesn't work out."

She added, "If you start out with your wife with you, you will have a better chance." She feels strongly that farm wives should be allowed to help make decisions, from the biggest to the smallest, and then

they, too, will share worries about the weather, milk surplus and the bugs on the alfalfa. They will share the joys of accomplishments and face the crisis together.

"Husbands who consider their wives as smart as they are have an excellent chance of having a wife there helping them. She'll be a wife who has faith in her husband."

To the wives, she points out, "You're just as responsible for the debt. When you see a man and wife working together it's a sure sign of management."

Jane credits much of their success to a hired man who has been with them for eight years. "We give him a lot of credit for the success we've had. We try to consider him one of us."

Calf feeding for Jane is a joy, not a chore. She says, "They depend on me, and feeding them takes all the worries out of my day. I know the calves and their personalities and I can sense when one is not well. They are my pride and joy." Her attitude is reflected in the fact that they have lost just two calves since 1973.

Last year, Jane was selected to be a young couple representative on the Board of Directors of the Maryland-Virginia Milk Cooperative. "I attended all the board meetings," she says, "I will miss it now."

The Benners have a 12-year-old daughter who "grew up in the feed cart and on the tricycle in the gutter," who knows all the cows by heart. "We've never tried to keep anything from her - she knew when we were going through hard times. She's learned how to be happy by herself, and we're real proud of her."

With their daughter in 4-H and other involvements in the community, Jane says they have a full life away from the farm. She adds, "We don't feel we are being left out. We're happy doing what we're doing."

*Homestead  
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