

Father and daughter do the chores at Redal Acres

By Sally Bair
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BIGLERVILLE — Ten years ago Robin Ridinger purchased her first 4-H calf, Elva Kate.

She still has Elva Kate, along with 20 other animals of her own — all registered Holsteins. While Robin says she'll never know for sure if this developed her interest in farming, it certainly had an influence.

Today at age 22, Robin is farming full time with her father, Jim, on their 176-acre farm, Redal Acres, near Biglerville. Her mother Audrey and two sisters, Dawn 20, and Laurie, 18, also help with the operation.

Robin graduated from Penn State in 1982 with a degree in general agriculture, and has been farming with her father since. She says, "I had no problem coming home. A lot of people in our fraternity went home to farm." Robin is a little sister in Delta Theta Sigma fraternity at Penn State.

One thing that Robin is very open about is the fact that many people, including friends and neighbors, ask her why she bothered going to college if she wanted to work on the farm. She replies, "It doesn't hurt anybody to gather more information. I met a lot of people. At school (college) it is accepted to go into farming. Your advisors support you if this is what you want to do. Many people go home. I can't imagine not doing this. I am proud of what I do."

Actually Robin laughs now as she says, "I didn't want to go to college. My mom made me go. I'm really glad she did."

Going to college has opened many new horizons for her, and she says, "I didn't know how milk was priced. It's not something you sit down and talk about even though you work with it all the time. Economics helped me a lot. I also learned about somatic cell counts, and I learned a lot by visiting the DHIA offices and dairy breeding research center. People don't understand how much you get out of college."

Robin started out her college career majoring in physical education at the Mont Alto campus of Penn State. "I didn't see much of a future in it," she says as she

talks about the switch she made to general agriculture.

She chose general ag instead of dairy production purposefully because, "I wanted to study, dairy, beef, chickens and hogs. I wanted to get some understanding of what other farmers go through. I took a lot of dairy courses, but I also took an agronomy course because I like to work in the fields." She took flower arranging and vegetable gardening because of a great personal interest in those areas. As a 4-H'er in Adams County she took those projects and was a state flower winner.

When Robin got her first calf, the family did not live on the farm where the milking and farming took place. However, since she needed to care for the calf, she began accompanying her father. She recalls, "I tied her to a wagon tongue to wash her and washed her with a bar of soap. My mother is a part-time beautician and would come and help to bleach her. You put so much into your first calf."

Elva Kate also may have become a favorite because she did so well at her first shows. Robin went to the District show in her first year of showing, and placed sixth at the state show with her. That accomplishment sent Robin on her way. "I didn't think anything could be that great. I wanted to continue."

Elva Kate came from Brown-valley Farm at Littlestown. Owners Ed and Tim Brown were second cousins to Robin and encouraged her in her 4-H activities. She bought two more animals from them, Dollie and Emily, and those three cows became the foundation for her present herd of 20, eight of which are milking.

Her first animal remains such a favorite, however, that Robin enjoys telling about the favored treatment she receives. For instance, Elva Kate did not get bred until the ninth service last time, and required hormones throughout the pregnancy. "We give special attention to our animals," Robin says.

Robin has worked on the farm and in the fields since they moved to their present location about eight years ago. "We always helped every summer. Dawn and I love making hay. We help our



Elva Kate, Robin's first 4-H animal, may be responsible for starting Robin in a career of farming. Robin says Elva Kate is her "favorite," and remains very tame and cooperative because of the favored treatment she received over the years.

neighbors too. When we're working we make a game out of it and it makes it go faster." Dawn is a senior in dairy production at Penn State.

Robin adds, "I like to do physical work. I do the DHIA records but I don't enjoy it." She also says she likes to milk listening to country music. "It's helpful," she says.

Although milking is not her favorite job on the farm, she has taken a job milking part time for Bob Gitt at Penn Gate Farms at Littlestown. On the days she goes there to milk, she rises at 3 a.m. to be there and milks from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. She gets home in time to help with the milking there from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. In the afternoon she goes through the same routine.

It's a job which earns her some extra money and helps her see another farming operation.

Robin is proud of a recent accomplishment in successfully breeding a Jersey on the farm. Her sister Laurie has Jerseys for 4-H

animals and there are a few others in the herd. She says she's not about to put any AI organizations out of the business and adds that they use Atlantic Breeders bulls on the herd with the breeding done by Atlantic technicians.

Calves on the farm are raised in hutches on whole milk as much as possible. "We try to avoid milk replacers," Robin states. From the hutches, the calves go to heifer barns where they are grouped according to age. Robin points out that she and Dawn helped build the barn. "We helped put in the main trusses. It was a learning experience. You learn something new every day."

Learning is part of what Robin enjoys on the farm. She states, "People sometimes think college people know everything. You get much more out of actually working. Ours is a small farm, but it keeps me busy and it is enough for me."

Robin is still active in 4-H, as a gardening leader. Her mother is organizational leader for the Beecherstown 4-H Club. Robin also does the planting and harvesting of the family garden, but leaves the preserving to someone else. She makes it clear that cooking and cleaning are also not her favorite activities, much preferring to do outside working.

When she was involved in 4-H in Adams County, she participated in many projects and other activities and says, "4-H helped me a lot. I had to take a speech class, and it wasn't bad because I always did demonstrations in 4-H."

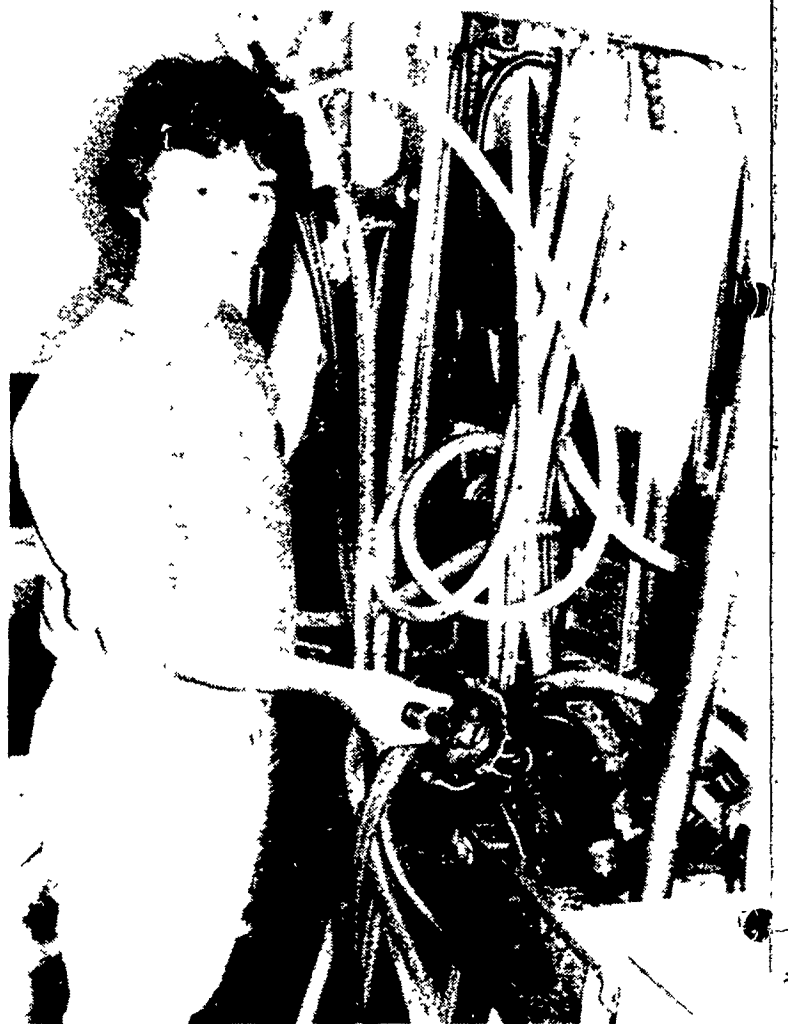
About the future of farming, Robin says, "I hate to see smaller farmers going out of business. Farmers need help. Everything starts at the farm. They need to meet so many standards — most people don't realize that."

As for her future, Robin is more certain. "I'll always be farming."

Homestead Notes



Robin Ridinger shovels silage into the trough for heifers in their heifer barn at their Biglerville farm. Robin is working full time with her family on their dairy farm after graduating in general agriculture at Penn State last June.



Robin helps with the milking on a regular basis, and part of her job is to help prepare and clean the milking system for the pipeline milker.