

Pennwood Farms is Percheron proud

BY LAURA ENGLAND

CENTRE HALL — Situated in the south-central part of the state, Centre County is well-known for its role as home to Penn State University, complete with its serene, country-like atmosphere. However, housing the agriculturally-based university is only one of several roles that leads to Centre County farm pride.

Of the 67 Pennsylvania counties, Centre County has one of the highest concentrations of draft horses in the state and is number one in the Percheron breed. This is a fact which brings a beam of pride across the faces of Percheron breeders John and Susan Cole of Centre Hall.

Owners and operators of the Centre Hall Farm Store Inc., located on Allison Street in Centre Hall, John and Susan consider themselves promoters of the Percheron breed, and "I'm proud of that," John said.

The Coles began raising Percherons in 1970 as a sideline hobby to their farm store business and 400-acre farm. They also raise 150 feeder cattle and about 40 Angus-Chianina cross breeding cattle.

Their first purchase of the draft horse breed - they had always owned light and walking horses - included two young fillies. Their herd now numbers 15 with Susan paying close attention to breeding and genetics and John placing his interest in hitching competitions.

As Susan explained, John grew up around horses while she, herself, had a farming background. "John's dad worked with horses," she said, "and they always had buggy or riding horses."

Both John and Susan are Centre

County natives. Susan grew up in State College and John in Boalsburg. With each having a farming background and growing up in an agricultural county, raising horses came naturally.

In raising the breed, Susan keeps up-to-date on the breeding. This she does through reading and research and just by visually appraising other Percheron horses to determine important breed traits.

To get the breed characteristics and refinement they wanted in their horses, John and Susan traveled to Alberta, Canada, three years ago and bought one of the country's premier breeding stallions, Lo Lynd Joe Laet. They later bought Glynlea's Pride, also from Alberta, to breed with Laet's offspring.

"We bought Pride to bring outcrossing into the herd," John said. "We wanted size and refinement."

The size and refinement the Coles were looking for has been recognized at the breed shows they attend. Pride was named champion stallion at this year's Farm Show and was reserve junior champion at the 1981 Ohio State Fair. Both Laet's and Pride's female offspring have done well at shows, also.

Another area of show competition the Cole's have challenged is hitching where horses compete as a team or in groups to pull a wagon. This is where John's real interest in the Percheron breed lies.

John has been in competitive hitching for three years, participating in the Farm Show and Ohio State Fair contests. At the

Farm Show, he has won every class but one during the past two years.

"Hitching is a real art," John said. "You have to get all the horses working right together, and the timing is unbelievable."

A right-hand partner in John's hitching ventures is Lewis Mothersbaugh of Linden Hall, Centre County. "Lewis does as much of the driving as I do," John said.

To prepare the horses for hitching competitions, John put up lights around his practice track to allow for night driving. The horses are worked about 25 times prior to shows.

"To make a good team," John said, "the horses have to click like one, look like one and think like one."

John, who competes in two-horse, three-horse, four-horse and six-horse team categories, realizes the practice needed to make a good team and begins to work his horses at about one and a half to two years of age.

"When we leave Pennsylvania, the competition is tough," Susan said. "They're all very high class hitching contests."

In addition to the breeding and hitching interests, the Coles also tie their Percherons into their feed store promotions. During Christmas, children are granted hitching rides on a wagon with Santa Clause. The horses have also served as transportation for newly wed couples.

The interest in the horses has definitely helped promote the business, John said. The business, which employs 10 workers, covers Centre County and deals primarily in dairy, custom spraying and fertilizing, seed and farm supplies



Getting a little exercise in a snow-covered pasture are these two, spirited geldings which are used in hitching competitions.

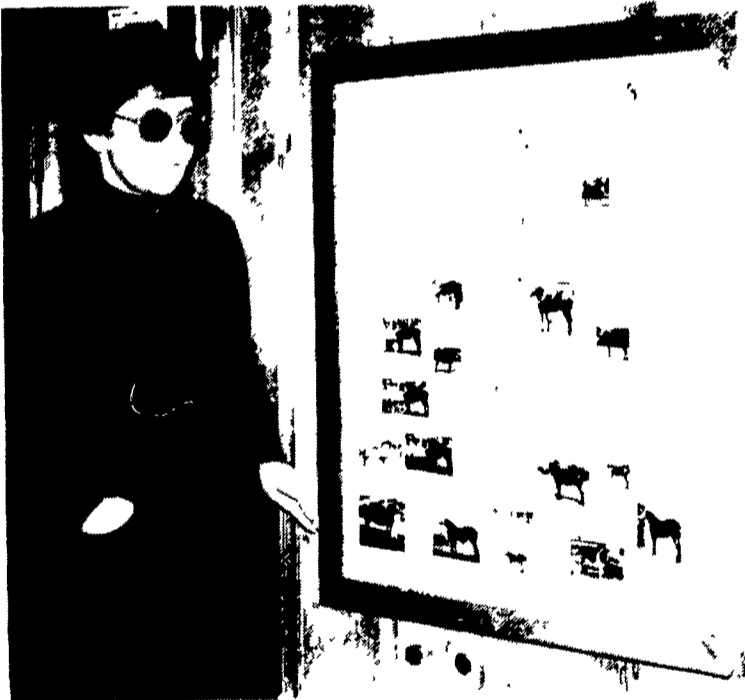
and feeding rations.

The Cole's 28-year-old son, Chris, is in partnership with his father and likewise, shares an interest in raising horses, too. Chris owns a couple of walking horses.

The Cole's other sons, Billy and Chad, and daughters Kelly and Yung Mi, also grew up with an interest in horses. And now, the Cole's grandchildren have taken the horses to heart.

"It's (raising Percherons) a family and country-oriented hobby," Susan said. "We try to include our family. It's the right way to go."

And the pride in raising the horses stands out. As John added, his goal for both his farm store business and the Percherons is "we want to continue to do what we're doing, but better."



An "Ode to Joe." Susan Cole displays a homemade poster relating the success the Coles have had with their Percheron draft horses.



John Cole, Center Hall, poses with 13-year-old Lo Lynd Joe Laet, a one time premier breeding stallion in Canada.



These two young mares are part of the 15-head of Percheron draft horses raised at Pennwood Farms in Centre Hall, Centre County.



A 2,250-pound Percheron gelding, Prince is an important part of John and Susan Cole's speciality hitching team.