

The Suffolk folks of Breezeview Farm

BY JACK HUBLEY

ATGLEN — Bill MacCauley had a lot to learn about sheep when he married Joan Niemyer 22 years ago. And judging from the way things turned out at the couple's 17 acre Breezeview Farm near Atglen, it appears that Mr. MacCauley graduated with honors.

Situated on a grassy knoll in Chester County, the blue-gray house and matching barn with its flock of black stockinged ewes and lambs has become well known for its production of quality purebred Suffolk sheep.

The MacCauley's flock of breeding ewes currently numbers 35, with 15 yearling ewes rounding out the female contingent.

Representing the men's club at Breezeview Farm are Breezeview 267 Highrider, the farm's home-grown stud ram, and two

yearlings, including a Highlander son, and a Brewer ram named champion at this year's Pa. Farm Show.

Completing Breezeview's four-legged membership are the farm's four cats in charge of rodent control, and an equal number of Border collies, a breed specifically developed to keep the livestock moving in the right direction.

Breezeview traces its roots to Joan's involvement in the 4-H program, when at the age of 11, she raised her first three lambs at the family's home in Newtown Square.

A self-confessed city slicker from Upper Darby, Bill stepped as easily into the sheep business as he did to life with his new bride, and a winning team of Chester County Suffolk shepherds was born.

The couple produced their own stud rams during the 1960's, until



A field full of freshly shorn Suffolks, along with a sprinkling of smaller cheviots, are the "long and short of it" at Breezeview Farm.



This yearling ram, a son of Breezeview Nightrider, shows the handsome head characteristic of MacCauley Suffolks.

1970 when they bought their first ram, an Ohio animal out of the famous Spanish Jack.

By that time, young Bill, age five, was already heavily into sheep. Now 18, the oldest of the three MacCauley children maintains his interest in sheep, living on a sheep farm and majoring in agribusiness management at Penn State.

At ages 17 and 13 respectively, daughters Nancy and Donna share their parent's interests, as well.

The MacCauley name echoed repeatedly during this year's Farm Show, with all three young shepherds winning their respective classes. Nancy's FFA project lamb became the show's reserve grand champion market lamb, and Bill showed the champion ram and junior champion ewe.

The young MacCauleys have also demonstrated their abilities to pick other winners, with Bill being a member of the winning livestock judging team during 1982 state competition, and Nancy named as high individual in last year's junior division.

As a first-year collegian, Bill continues his winning ways by being named reserve champion Suffolk showman at Penn State's Little International Livestock Expo last weekend.

But his parents emphasize that awards, ribbons and plaques are far from the entire picture.

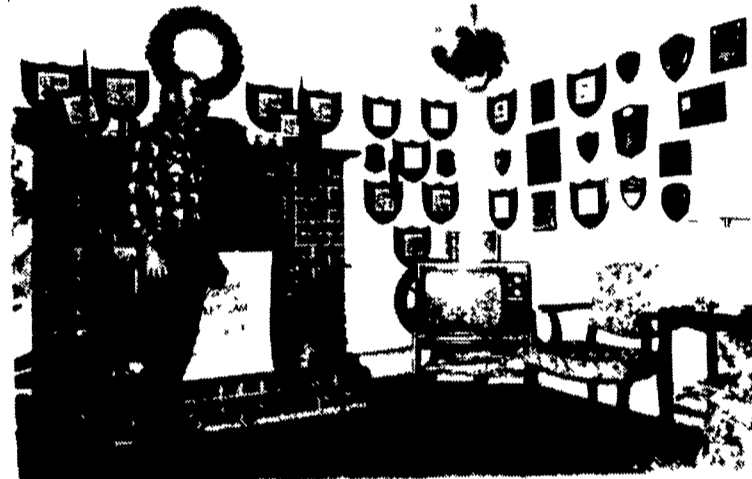
"If you've got a good show flock and a good commercial flock, then you have a well-balanced operation," stresses the senior MacCauley.

And the waiting list for MacCauley's lambs testifies to the flock's commercial success. Most of the MacCauley animals are sold privately for food, or to commercial breeders, with few animals ever reaching the auction block.

Fortunately for those with a taste for Breezeview leg of lamb, the flock is very prolific. Through good genetics and proper diet, the flock's lambing success was 194 percent this year, with every ewe producing at least one lamb, and six sets of triplets born.

A diet of ground corn, oats and soybean meal keeps Breezeview ewes in good trim, and Bill makes sure that mineral supplements are available at all times. The MacCauleys note that such a menu produces a tender, tasty product, and they recommend that their Suffolks are table ready at three to four months of age, at a weight of about 130 pounds.

The family finds its 10 acres of cropland sufficient to keep their animals supplied with corn and



Bill MacCauley surveys the results of an award-winning team: Breezeview Suffolks and a trio of second-generation MacCauley shepherds, Bill, III, Donna and Nancy.



Jeb, the MacCauley's nine-year-old Border collie, is one of four canine shepherds on the farm capable of showing the sheep just where they're supposed to be. And he'll take fences in stride to get the job done.

hay, and last spring the MacCauleys experimented with Brassicas as a means of providing a high protein forage source for ewes during the breeding season.

Planting both rape and turnips in early May, Bill started grazing his animals in 90 days, allowing the sheep to feed for a half hour, to 45 minutes at a time. The Brassicas were grazed for six weeks, permitted to regenerate for three more weeks, and then grazed again for another three weeks. Bill found his Brassicas to be an economical source of protein, and stated that the two crops weathered last summer's drought very well.

Lamb chops, of course, are not all there is to sheep ranching, and although Suffolks are primarily a meat breed, they also produce a good fleece. Joan says that Suffolk

wool washes very white and dyes nicely, although some black fiber is not unusual.

Bill handles the shears not only for his own flock, but for a number of other shepherds as well. He's been "cutting hair" for the Philadelphia Zoo's flock of 17 animals for the past 10 years, and has given shearing demonstrations for many school groups.

Shearing 500 to 600 sheep a year, MacCauley has managed to trim his time to between five and seven minutes per animal, but he wasn't always that adept.

"Before we were married we did our first sheep with a pair of scissors," Bill chuckles, "and it took us three hours." Though he currently uses electric equipment, MacCauley can de-fleece a full-grown Suffolk, one of the largest of

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Joan and Bil MacCauley survey a portion of their purebred Suffolk flock. "What we've accomplished is the result of the whole family working together," notes Joan.