

Students and DHIA benefit in testing program

BY LAURA ENGLAND
OGDENSBURG — Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) was looking for a way to improve its association and continually meet standards set by the National DHIA Association. At the same time, three Penn State students were hoping to get more on-farm work experience and get a taste of agriculture, Pennsylvania-style, during their summer break.

Fortunately for all involved, the students met up with the DHIA for what has been, so far, a mutual and beneficial encounter.



According to Ray Pruss, administrative assistant for the DHIA, the association needed to improve its ability to test each herd 12 times a year. Problems were experienced when scheduling vacations and hiring new personnel - there were no available milk testers to step in and take over. The DHIA saw a need to correct this and "not fall short" of national standards, Pruss said.

To compensate for the problem, the DHIA developed a summer assistant program this year. The idea, Pruss explained, was to hire Penn State students who would substitute for vacationing supervisors or fill in where needed. Other benefits were noted, also.

"The program will provide interaction with the University," Pruss added. "It will also give students the opportunity to see different farms."

It was this opportunity, to see agriculture Pennsylvania-style, that prompted Penn State students Karen Long, Bill Middleton and

Craig Williams to apply for the summer assistant positions.

Karen, the daughter of Fred Long, Akron, is a junior majoring in dairy production. Having grown up on a 28-acre farmette in Willow Street, Lancaster County, Karen said she wanted more farm experience.

"I like to try a little bit of everything for experience," she explained about her past and present involvement in agriculture.

As a high school student, Karen participated in FFA activities and received a chain dairy calf through the Penn Manor FFA Chapter. This helped to boost her interest in dairying, which eventually led to her selection in attending Penn State. There, she has found additional farm experience through the Penn State Dairy Science Club and most recently the DHIA summer assistant program.

"The job is very interesting, and you get to see different dairy operations," Karen said. "Also, you fill the supervisors shoes and learn that each one has his own way of doing things."

Learning "something new every day" is how Bill, a senior dairy production major, sums up his job as a summer DHIA assistant. The son of William and Jenny Middleton, Pleasantville, Bedford County, Bill worked on various farms as a youth and found he liked dairy cattle enough to make it a career.

"I would like to get a herd together sometime," he said, adding that he currently owns 15 Holsteins.

As Bill realized, though, having cows is not all there is to dairying - one needs to learn management techniques. And each farmer has his own way of doing just that.

"When I'm testing, I really get to talk to the farmers and see how they manage their farms," he said.

Unlike Karen and Bill, who were not raised on large commercial



DHIA summer assistant Karen Long, Akron, takes a milk sample from a cow on the Harold and Donald Bollinger farm, Lebanon County.

farms, Craig grew up on a 120-head Jersey farm in Dauphin County. The son of Tom and Tiz Williams, Middletown, Craig wasn't quite decided about a future in agriculture and enrolled in the marine biology major at South Hampton College, Long Island, N.Y. He was there for one year.

"When I talked to people (at school), I realized what I had in agriculture," Craig said about his decision to transfer to Penn State.

Now a dairy production major, Craig said he also wanted to experience agriculture and see how other farmers manage their operations. Like Karen and Bill, he found that opportunity through the DHIA summer assistant program.

"You get to work at another farm and see how they do things," Craig said. "It's a good experience."

Before the three Penn Staters could begin their "experience," they were required to take a DHIA short course at Penn State. During the course they were taught how to operate the different types of milk meters, to read, prepare and ship samples and how to read and explain the DHIA record sheets.

With the training behind them, Karen, Bill and Craig were sent to their county areas and became full-fledged milk tester assistants. But, as all three explained, their training went well beyond the short course at Penn State.

For Karen, the biggest lesson has been in dealing with the different ways the fulltime milk testers do their job and how farmers expect her to follow the same routine.

"I try to get things into a pattern," she explained. "I know I



Karen Long, a Penn State junior, records the milk weight on the DHIA record sheet.

have to get a lot of information."

Bill has found this to be true in his case also. "Every tester has his own way to do things," he added, "and we have to learn to adapt."

Adapting to different techniques has not been the only lesson. Reading and understanding the DHIA record sheets has been the basis for experience in trial and error. This has been fairly simple to correct, Craig explained, with a quick phone call to the DHIA office in State College.

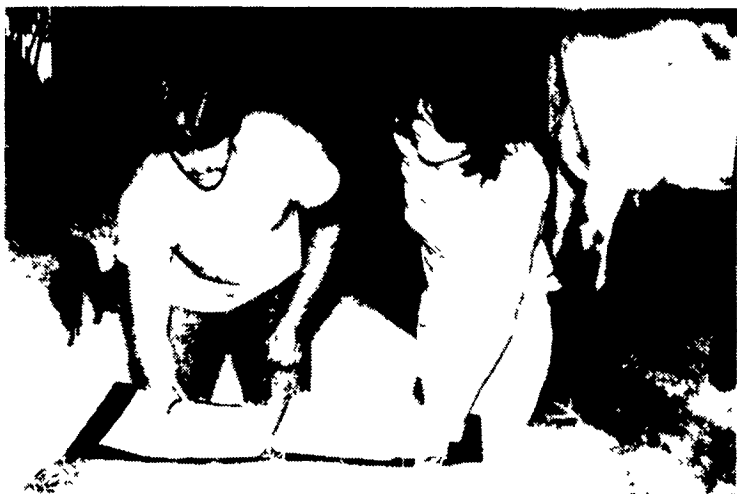
Despite the learning lessons, the three assistants say the overall experience is worthwhile. Not only are they learning about farming techniques, but by the end of the summer they will each have put a few miles on their odometers and

will have seen various parts of Pennsylvania.

To date, Karen has worked in Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster and Lebanon counties. Bill has traveled through Centre and Tioga counties, and Craig has been assigned to eastern Pennsylvania, including Bedford, Centre, Chester, Dauphin, Perry and Tioga counties.

Through the DHIA summer assistant program, Karen, Bill and Craig said they have gained invaluable experience. On the other hand, the DHIA has found a way to meet national standards.

And, not to mention, as an extra incentive, one of the three students will receive a \$500 scholarship.



Penn State senior Bill Middleton, Pleasantville, Bedford County goes over DHIA record sheets with Diane Spencer, Roaring Branch.



Taking a break from their busy schedules as DHIA employees are, from left, summer assistant Craig Williams, fieldman Jay Wilson and summer assistant Bill Middleton.



Craig Williams, a DHIA summer assistant from Middletown, Dauphin County, prepares to take a butterfat sample. Craig was testing on the Charles Groover farm, Tioga County.