

130-year-old tradition kicks off Reading Fair

FLEETWOOD — The Berks County Agricultural and Horticultural Association celebrated its 130-year-old tradition last Wednesday evening at the annual banquet to "kick-off" the 1984 Reading Fair. Billed as the "showcase of Berks County agriculture," the traditional Reading Fair is sponsored by the Agricultural and Horticultural Association.

The Reading Fair features Berks County agriculture and each year honors an outstanding farm family, an outstanding 4-H boy and girl, and an outstanding FFA boy and girl throughout the week of festivities. At the banquet, the public got to meet the 1984 honorees as they were congratulated by state and local

officials, as well as the previous 28 outstanding Berks County farm families.

"People are what makes the Reading Fair great," announced Dave Souders, vice president of the Agricultural and Horticultural Association of Berks County. Also stating that for this year's fair there will be a ribbon cutting in the sky by the army parachute team, Souders mentioned several of the coming highlights and concluded, "it will be a great family time out, and it's all free."

The speaker for the evening, State Sen. Michael O'Pake, echoed the sentiments of Souders and said, "I still think you can't top Berks." O'Pake stated that most often farming, community life and spirit go together.

"I recognize how important agriculture is to the economics of a community," he continued. "It is important that we preserve the family farm for the traditional morals that is represents. One of the things that will ensure that America stays great is to make sure that the American family stays good."

O'Pake stressed that this means that a respect for God, the law, morals, honesty, and the fellow man must be taught in the home.

"These are the values nourished by the family farm," he said.

In a society fostering the "breakdown of traditional values," O'Pake concluded, the family farm is much needed and valued. He ended his presentation with congratulations to the 1984 Outstanding Farm Family of Berks County, the Wilson Balthaser family, R1 Bernville.

Wilson Balthaser and his wife, LaVerne, daughter, Tammy, age 14; and sons, Randy, age 11, and Jason, age 9, farm over 600 acres and milk 83 cows on a family farm in its fourth generation. Members of the Shartlesville Grange, the family's list of accomplishments, awards, and community activities earned them this honor of "Outstanding Farm Family".

They were congratulated by Albert Boscov, president of the association as well as applauded by the previous farm family winners.

"If it weren't for our parents that raised us both on farms, I don't think we'd be here," LaVerne Balthaser stated when she and her husband accepted the award.

The family received a plaque and a check for \$600.00. They will be the grand marshals of the parade on Monday, at 6 p.m. and will be honored throughout the week at the fair.

Outstanding 4-H'ers



Outstanding 4-H youth of Reading Fair are Kirk Fisher, Oley; and Patty Dreisbach, Hamburg.

Also honored were outstanding youth in 4-H and FFA who were awarded plaques and savings bonds for their achievements in their agricultural projects.

The outstanding 4-H girl of Berks County is a well known individual for her dairy knowledge and awards. Patricia Dreisbach, R3 Hamburg, was selected on her merit in the National 4-H Awards Program in the dairy category. Her major projects include dairy, wildlife, vegetable gardening, and veterinary science. She is a member of the Northern Berks 4-H Dairy Club and the Tilden Community 4-H Club.

Patty is the 18-year-old daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Dreisbach. She was the 1983 winner of the Junior Dairyman's contest held in Timonium, Md., and a member of the Berks County Dairy Judging

team when it won statewide honors. She serves on many committees and in many offices and is currently the national queen for the Jersey breed.

Kirk Fisher, R1 Oley, was selected as the outstanding 4-H boy. A Charolais breeder, Kirk is also very active locally and statewide in 4-H. He is the 17-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Steve Fisher.

Jim Heffner, Fleetwood, and Mary McMullen, Elverson, were the FFA recipients of the outstanding FFA awards. Presented to them by Harvey Smith, regional director, they were applauded for their work in agriculture by their advisors.

Albert Boscov concluded the evening by again congratulating the "outstanding farm community," and it's "outstanding members."

Outstanding FFA'ers



Outstanding FFA honorees at Reading Fair are Mary McMullen, Elverson; and Jim Heffner, Fleetwood.

Family values bring honors to this Berks dairy clan

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Staff Correspondent

BERNVILLE — They were honored for fostering high moral values at a time when society needs to witness outstanding examples. They were praised for teaching their children respect for God, country, and fellow man, and for exerting a positive influence in their grange, and community.

Selected as the 1984 Outstanding Farm Family of Berks County, Wilson and LaVerne Balthaser, R1 Bernville, and their children, Tammy, 14; Randy, 11; and Jason, 9, just do what comes naturally.

This fourth generation farm family continues a family tradition on their Northkill Creek Farm owned by Wilson and his father,

Mark. As LaVerne Balthaser stated when they accepted the award at the Reading Fair awards banquet last week, "their support helped get us as far as we are." Both Wilson and his wife credit their parents, both farm families, for making available the resources and teaching them the values for which they are honored this year.

"When there is corn standing there like that, you really enjoy it more," Wilson Balthaser states, motioning towards his healthy corn crop when he is asked how he likes farming in a depressed time.

"You got to really like it. I'm going to stay where I'm at because of the cost of expansion."

The Balthasers currently milk 83 cows and farm over 650 acres.

Three generations of Balthasers



Three generations of Balthasers include, from left, Grace and Mark, Wilson and Laverne and children, Jason, Randy and Tammy; and West German visitor, Frauke Jens, at right.

They milk in a stanchion barn equipped with a pipeline and feed inside and also at an outside bunk during the summer.

Even though they employ one full-time man and one part-time man, the Balthasers are kept busy with their many community activities, and with the 4-H projects of their children.

The three children raise and show cows, chickens, pigs, and turkeys in 4-H. "That's the best thing we're in," Tammy states about 4-H. She enjoys showing her prize winning Brown Swiss animals, while her brother, Randy,

prefers his pigs. The youngest, Jason, not sure about what he likes says that he wants sheep.

The three siblings are involved in the daily chores and take care of most of the feeding of the younger stock and the unloading of hay. "They're involved here, but you got to let them get involved in activities too. They're going to hate the farm if it's all work and no play," Balthaser explains.

Wilson Balthaser took over his father's farm in 1977. That was also the year they installed the pipeline system. He has also changed his feeding program for

his herd of Holsteins to maintain his rolling herd average of 15,000 pounds milk with a 3.8% test as cheaply and efficiently as possible.

"I think I can feed cows cheaper with high moisture corn and haylage," Balthaser explains. He turned to haylage instead of corn silage and now utilizes about two thirds haylage and one third corn silage in his feeding program. No baled hay is fed in the summer and the cows have unlimited access to a bunk feeder filled with haylage in the meadow. They are fed grain twice a day and maintain a but-

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With their favorites



Randy Balthaser holds Gilda, his 4-H project; and Tammy shows Miracle, her favorite Brown Swiss heifer.