

# A college education

## Is a degree necessary for success in ag careers?

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LANCASTER — At one time a young person who wanted to land a job in agriculture took vo-ag classes in high school and worked on a farm in the evenings. After high school, he either went home to help dad on the farm, found a neighbor who needed some help, or struck out on his own.

But agriculture is changing and farmers and others in agriculture-related fields often need more knowledge than they can get in high school. That's why many students aspiring to ag careers today decide to continue their education at a college or university.

Just how important is a college degree to success in agriculture? Isn't it possible to learn just as much on the job, without investing thousands of dollars and four years of life?

For some graduates a college degree has opened doors they believe would have remained

closed without an education. Kim Stroud, a 1981 University of Maryland graduate, credits her college advisor with indirectly helping her land her first job as associate editor of the American Guernsey Cattle Club's journal.

"You never know when they (people she met in college) are going to come back and help you," she says.

Kim entered West Virginia Wesleyan with the intention of getting a degree in extension home economics. When selecting a major, she said, she kept in mind that girls were supposed to stick to cooking and sewing. But a little soul-searching revealed that home economics wasn't what she really wanted to do, so she quit school and spent the next two years milking cows and working for a department store.

When her parents decided to move close to the University of Maryland, Kim went with them and returned to school, this time

for a degree in vocational agriculture. Still unsure that she was taking the right path, Kim talked to a number of people and finally took the advice of a friend who told her that no matter what aspect of agriculture she decided to pursue, she would need communication skills. By working closely with her advisors, she developed her own major in ag journalism.

Kim says her degree has helped her, but adds, "It's not the degree, but what you learned while you were there," that is important. And while classes and bookwork are an essential and important part of college, Kim says it is the extracurricular activities that have been especially helpful. "You learn so much out of the classroom setting," she notes.

During her time at the University of Maryland, Kim had three internships, two in the extension information department at Maryland and the other in extension working directly with a county agent. "That, above all else, has been the most important," Kim says.

Kim doesn't believe she would be at her present position as an advertising specialist with Atlantic Breeders in Lancaster if she hadn't gone to college. Her journalism courses have been especially helpful to her as she develops brochures, pamphlets and educational materials.

But her knowledge of cows, honed during a year on the University of Maryland dairy cattle judging team, has also been important. At Atlantic she supervises cattle photography, a job which requires the ability to separate the good cows from the bad. "You've got to know what a good cow looks like," she says.

Agri-Graphics cow photographer Sylvia Cooper, a 1982 Penn State graduate, also needs to know a good cow when she sees one. In her job at Agri-Graphics Sylvia photographs dairy cattle for farmers. She must set the cow's feet and make noise to perk up the ears so the animal looks its very best in the picture.

When Sylvia decided to go to college she had no idea that she would end up taking pictures of cows. Before going to Penn State, she obtained a degree in environmental science from Slippery Rock. She worked for a short time setting up an environmental learning program for a school district, but eventually worked herself out of a job.

It was then she decided to return



One of Kathy Strock's jobs on the farm is breeding the cows. Here she takes a straw of semen from the deep-freeze. College courses at Penn State have been helpful in making breeding decisions, Kathy says.

to school. "I decided I was going to go for something I really enjoyed and that was dairy production," she says.

After graduation Sylvia went to work on a dairy farm. From there she went to Lancaster Farming as livestock editor, and then on to Atlantic Breeders as a linear mate specialist.

Like Kim, Sylvia says that the people she met at college have been important to her success. "It's all the contacts I made in school and the friends I made there that are the most important," she stresses. Without them, she says she probably wouldn't be where she is today.

A total of seven years of college have provided Sylvia with a wealth of knowledge to draw on. "All the education has just broadened my background and you draw on all these things when you need them," she says.

Although Sylvia says her education has been valuable, she doesn't think a college degree is essential to success. "I wouldn't say you have to go to school to be a success," she says. "If you really want to, you can stay home on the farm and learn what you need to be a success."

But a college education can be useful on the farm. Nancy Jarrett, a 1977 Delaware Valley College graduate, has been putting her education to work on the dairy farm she and her husband, Mike, operate together in Montgomery. Mike and Nancy married shortly after Nancy graduated from Delaware Valley with a degree in dairy husbandry.

While Mike liked the cows,

Nancy says, he never had them milking to their capacity and she made it her job to increase the herd's productivity. They manage the herd together, but it is Nancy who makes most of the breeding decisions and who formulates the feed, while Mike concentrates his efforts on crops.

Experience on Delaware Valley's dairy judging team taught Nancy to recognize a good cow, knowledge that has been helpful in cow selection. A college education has also been helpful in formulating feed and in making general management decisions, she adds.

"The college education gave me a lot of management ideas," Nancy says. While in college she had the opportunity to visit a number of farms and to observe different operations, giving her new ideas about running a dairy farm.

Nancy drew on her education when she and Mike were planning the dairy barn they recently installed. "I brought in a lot of ideas from my management classes at school," she notes.

A work-study program at Delaware Valley offered Nancy an opportunity to get some hands-on experience to complement her classwork.

Nancy believes college is a good experience and provides a time to see and learn more things, away from your own farm. An education is especially important today, when dairying is becoming more of a professional business.

"It's going to take a well-managed dairy person to do a good

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Kathy Strock cares for the young stock on her family's dairy farm. She believes one of the contributions she's made to the farm is doing her chores more efficiently.



Kim Stroud has found her college education a valuable asset in her job as an advertising specialist for Atlantic Breeders.

# Homestead Notes