

# Styer Family Finds Produce Business Enjoyable Despite Long Hours

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LEWISBURG — What's it like being the wife of a produce farmer.

Cathy Styer, a native born Pittsburgher, says she's writing a book about her experiences as a produce farmer's wife entitled, "If They Could See Me Now."

Daisy Styer, Cathy's sister-in-law, notes she never gets up or goes to bed before she has to.

Edna Styer, mother-in-law of Cathy and Daisy, observes she feels guilty sitting down sometimes.

Each of the three women works fulltime helping her husband operate a farm produce market. The Styer families represent a total of 60 years of produce marketing.

Edna Styer and her husband, Ralph, of Muncy, have been in the produce business for 43 years. Potatoes and blueberries are their major crops although they also retail pears, strawberries, and blackberries. Of their 20 acres of potatoes, most will be sold wholesale, Edna says.

Daisy and Tom Styer, Muncy, began their operation 11 years ago. This year they planted 21 acres of sweet corn, 15 acres of pumpkins, and 10 acres of strawberries on their 75 acre farm. They grow a variety of crops such as peppers and cucumbers and four years ago added a greenhouse which enables them to raise their own vegetable and flower plants.

After working with Ralph and Edna for a time, Cathy and Sam Styer purchased a 100-acre farm near Lewisburg where they opened a produce market five and half

years ago. They furnish peppers and tomatoes for a nearby cannery, although their biggest crop this year was 30 acres planted in pumpkins. They retail pumpkins along with strawberries, black raspberries, cabbage and various kinds of beans.

The three women were seated on runged chairs around a much used wooden table on a recent evening in Daisy's family room. It was 8 p.m., the end of a 17 or 18 hour day for some, in the midst of their busiest season. And the women discussed what it is like to be the wife of a produce farmer.

Cathy, scurrying in at 8 p.m. and the last to arrive, observed shortly that she'd had no lunch, or supper and had seen almost nothing of her husband all day. Daisy nodded assent when she heard Cathy mention the omitted meals.

Then brows wrinkled for a few minutes as they discussed whether the first frost of the season might occur that evening. Predicted temperatures were near freezing levels. If the frost materialized, tender peppers and cucumbers would require irrigation to prevent freezing.

In each of their produce operations the women said their primary responsibility was to manage the market while their husbands took care of planting and harvesting the crops. Although when busy, they said, everyone, including other family members, helped do whatever was needed to get the work done.

"I still help in the fields when needed and Tom helps in the market when he's needed," Daisy remarked.

How well were the women able to mesh their roles as wives and mothers with the long hours



Cathy, Edna and Daisy Styer share a late-night cup of coffee after a long day.

demanding to run a successful produce operation? Edna, with the help of Ralph, reared six children while helping maintain a market; she says she took things "from day to day. You did what you had to do."

For Cathy, who came 12 years ago from the city to the country, life on the farm has been a continuing revelation. She still recalls her first close encounter with a cow. "She was huge," she said. And although her father-in-law assured her she would come to like chickens, she hasn't yet. She still feels intimidated by them, she explained. Not by their size, but by their very numbers.

With a degree in business and secretarial science, Cathy worked for a public utility in Pittsburgh before she married. Subsequently,

she says, she learned that "farmers do not have a time schedule" and claims she now puts in "36 hour days."

Getting back to how she blends roles, Cathy observed, "It is hard to do it all." She gets up at 4:45 a.m. but sometimes finds herself hanging up clothes at 7 p.m. Cathy and Sam are the parents of Jean, 12, and Robyn, 9.

"It's funsville trying to fit everybody into the schedule," Daisy observes with a similar comment. Finding enough time to do housework and getting meals on time for her family are a constant challenge.

In what has to be some kind of a record, Daisy reports that one night Tom's supper was warmed up seven times due to interruptions before he was able to eat it. Daisy and Tom have three children, twins, Keith and Kevin, 18, and Richard, 15.

What part of their market operation do the women enjoy most? Cathy and Daisy mentioned they enjoyed giving farm tours to children.

"I enjoy my tours. They're a lot of work and I'm dead tired, but I enjoy it," Cathy states.

On the tours, Cathy says, the children visit and feed farm animals such as chickens and pigs, go for a hayride, pick a pumpkin, and then snack on cider and ap-

ples. Other groups such as Brownies, Scout troops, and the handicapped enjoy the tours.

According to Daisy, 2,800 kids toured her farm last year.

The tours, Cathy and Daisy agree, serve as their number one promotional tool. When the children are allowed to do something such as feed the chickens, Daisy says, they remember it and come back.

In addition to liking the people, Edna listed another reason for enjoying the produce business. She said she enjoyed being together with Ralph. The Styers have been married almost 50 years.

"It's altogether different when they go off to work," she observed. "I've enjoyed having Dad around ... Raising six kids, it was a big help."

What did the ladies like least about their operation?

"The hassle. It's always a hassle," Daisy replied with no hesitation. "Everybody wants everything when it's not ripe."

"They always want pears when they're green," agreed Edna.

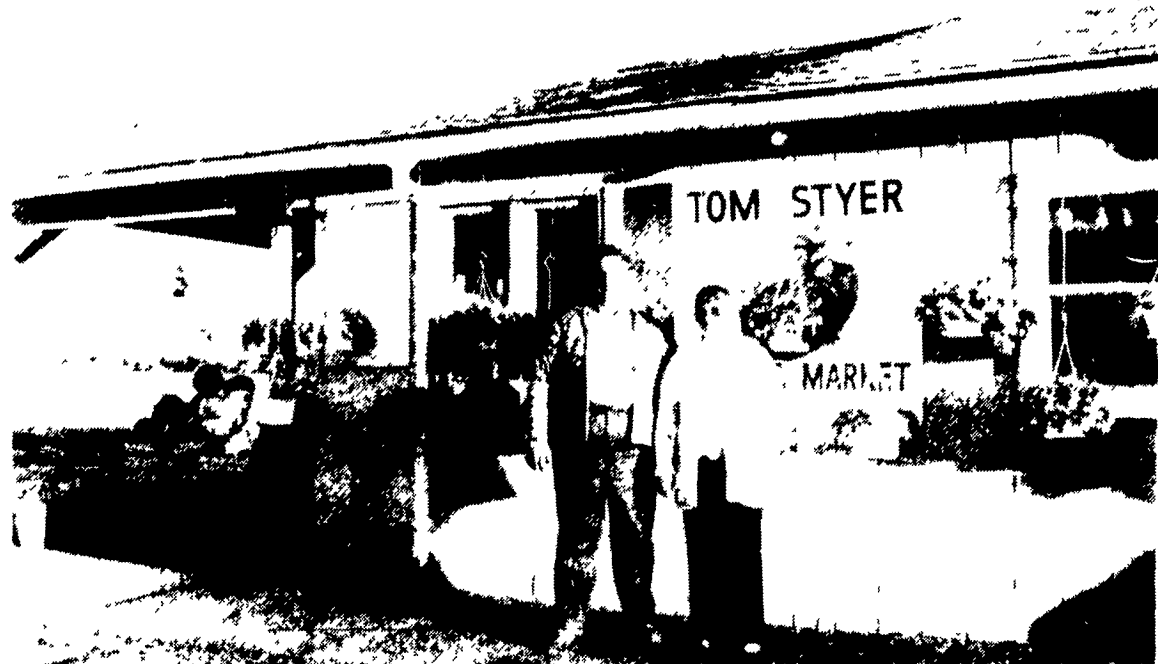
"The hassle is up in the top ten," Cathy observed wryly, noting that she dislikes trying to juggle everything around in the store.

What advice would the women offer to anyone thinking of opening a produce market?

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Cathy and Sam Styer put peaches into 2-quart containers in preparation for opening the store.



Tom and Daisy Styer of Muncy stand outside their market.



Ralph and Edna Styer stand under a tree by produce scales where they have done much of their business for the past 43 years.