

Lycoming County Farm Woman Holds Her Own In The Field

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MUNCY — If they look closely on a summer day, visitors to the Lycoming Mall in Muncy may notice a woman and a dog in the cab of a tractor working the fields opposite the mall. For almost 25 years Thelma White has been spending her days, often from sunup to sunset, helping husband, Frank, put out approximately 440 acres in grain.

Thelma, who ironically enough possesses a degree in home economics, stresses she loves the out-of-doors and the variety of activities farming offers.

"Farming is dirty work, a tiresome and thankless job, but also rewarding in the variety of activities," she remarks.

Thelma helps Frank in all aspects of farming, and although a woman, she is definitely a Jack-of-

all-trades and mistress of many in farming as well as other areas of her life.

Thelma and her Malamute, Mike, can be found in the fields chopping, discing and in the fall bringing in numerous wagonloads of corn from the fields to unload at the driers. She is in charge of drying and storing the corn and notes the care which must be taken with the corn.

"Monitoring the corn is very critical because you want to have it dried for safe storage but not over dried so the quality is endangered."

Thelma adds that some nights, since the drier runs continually, she slips out at 10 o'clock to unload a couple more loads into the drier. She says they were the first farmers to own an automatic grain drier in Pennsylvania.

When she's not driving tractor,

Thelma is busy greasing machinery or helping Frank repair equipment. In addition, she does the book work on the farm. All this is a far cry from the Georgia native who moved to Pennsylvania in June 1954 to work as a food supervisor at Penn State. It was there she met Frank, and in a whirlwind courtship married him in December of the same year.

In May 1955, Frank graduated with an agricultural degree and shortly thereafter the Whites rented Muncy Farms from the Brock estate and moved to their current address. Muncy Farms is a beautiful estate situated along the Susquehanna River with a large fieldstone house and an abundance of riverbottom acreage. Established in 1769 by a land grant from William Penn, the fieldstone house is the oldest house in Lycoming County.

It didn't take Thelma long to discover farming in the North differed a little from farming in the South.

"I was six months pregnant and he put me on a tractor to rake hay and I didn't know what a windrow was," she recalls, laughing.

Reared on a southern farm, Thelma observes, she had learned to pick cotton and raise corn and watermelon, but no hay. However, she proved a quick study, swiftly acquiring the necessary skills through the years.

During the first years of their tenure the Whites ran a dairy operation until the barn burned. Next, for a few years, Thelma recalls, they ran a successful swine operation, raising 1,200 pigs a year until the bottom dropped out of the market.

Although their boys, Steven and Lee, were born during these years, Thelma helped with the farming, particularly, she says, with the care of the animals. Both boys since, Thelma notes, have graduated from Penn State with degrees in chemical engineering and presently live out of state with their families.

"I milked cows and vaccinated pigs. I was on call 24 hours a day," recalls Thelma.

When they were involved in their swine operation, Thelma observed, they employed two men, but when they made the decision 24 years ago to grain farm, they decided they would farm without outside help. It was at this time that Thelma began spending a major chunk of her time in the fields.

Presently, Thelma relates with a



When she's not in the field, Thelma spends some of her time going over the books.

chuckle, she and Frank possess identical tractors marked "His" and "Hers." They bought a new Allis-Chalmers in 1961 and a used one exactly like it a year later, she says. The one equipped with power steering was designated Thelma's tractor and the other without it was supposed to be Frank's. Frequently, Thelma says, she found herself driving the tractor without power steering because Frank "forgot" and drove the other one. It wasn't long after Thelma got around to labeling the tractors his and hers that a

decision was made to install power steering in Frank's tractor.

In addition to field work, machinery repair, and farm book work, Thelma also performs the usual household chores and still finds time to pursue an abundant variety of other interests. Thelma enjoys sewing and says she hasn't bought a dress since she was nine years old. She also sews curtains and draperies.

Thelma has refurnished numerous pieces of furniture in their home such as cupboards,

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Although she holds a college degree in home economics, Thelma White of Muncy devotes much of her time to field work. Thelma and her husband, Frank, raise about 440 acres of grain. Here she points to the word "Hers" which distinguishes her tractor from the identical one Frank uses.



Thelma and her Malamute, Mike, disc a field. Mike has been riding with Thelma since he was a puppy.



Thelma displays the 1954 Willys Ambulance she and her husband, Frank, own. Members of a military vehicle collectors club, they have restored six such military vehicles.

Homestead Notes