

Penn-Agri Women Work To Promote Ag

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Berks Co. Correspondent
READING (Berks Co.)—
Penn-Agri Women isn't like most farm organizations. "We're not a coffee klatch group. We are too busy to see that the tea is properly brewed and the cookies arranged," explained President Carol Gregg.

Meetings aren't the group's strong suit either. "We're just too busy to have monthly meetings. Many of our members work on the family farm or have jobs. They belong to a lot of other organizations. It doesn't make sense to hold meetings just to hold meetings," Vice President Tressie Caton said.

And regardless of what the name implies, there are men in Penn Agri-Women. "We have 75 members including a couple of men. One wrote the Penn Agri Women song and the others are associated with ag businesses. Our membership also covers a wide array of ages. Many of our members are farm wives, others are in agriculture business. Some members just want to help promote agriculture," Gregg said.

Despite its atypical structure, this little known organization has packed a big wallop when it comes to promoting agriculture to the general public. The group has been working on that goal since it was established in 1974. Penn-Agri members have been instrumental in keeping the Ag in the Classroom program alive in Pennsylvania.

"Penn Agri Women involved in bringing the Ag in the Classroom program to Pennsylvania. Many members are involved in visiting classrooms. Others run farm tours for students. We are part of an effort to establish a statewide program," explained member Gail McPherson.

Caton, a farm real estate agent, emphasized the importance of educating the young. "I grew up on a West Texas cattle ranch and I think you carry a piece of your childhood with you all your life. Most of today's children don't have that opportunity. In many cases their parents didn't grow up on a farm either. Many children go to the store to get eggs but have no earthly idea that a chicken is involved," Caton said.

"We have got to teach children the value of farms. They need to know that the slice of bread from a wheat field and of the process that milk takes to get to the table," Caton said.

One of the group's best known projects is the Ag Day Luncheon held each year in Harrisburg. "This year we invited Governor Casey and we shared the spotlight with them. Because the governor attended there were even more people attending than usual. It must have been like the feeding of the 5,000. I understand some of the ladies even had to bring stuff home with them," Gregg said.

The meal features Pennsylvania

products, many donated by farmers and ag business people. Caton, this year's chairman, stressed the importance of keeping legislators and the non-farming public informed. "Our primary purpose is to keep the lines of communications open between farmers and the non-farming entity."

Penn Agri Women are affiliated with the national organization, American Agri-Women. "American Agri-Women is a coalition of organizations. We're not aligned with any particular commodity but represent all ag interests," Gregg said. The wife of a Holstein dairy farmer and a reporter on a weekly newspaper, Gregg also served three years as a vice president for the national group. She still represents the state on the national board.

The national network can help keep specific ag issues before legislators in Washington, D.C. "In our vast newsletter, the women of Alaska ask members from all over the country to write letters to their legislators concerning timber legislation. That option is open to us but I'm not aware that its ever been used in Pennsylvania," Gregg said.

How effective is the letter writing lobby? "I have worked with legislators in the past and I know their aides do read these letters. I'm sure they bring these issues to their bosses' attention," Gregg said.

The national group has 41 affiliates. "We are strongest in the Midwest and weakest in New England and the South," Gregg said.

American-Agri Women and Penn Agri Women share many concerns. "We're interested in leadership development. Food safety, the environment, and animal rights are big issues right now. National President Sandy Grindler plans to keep us informed on the acid rain issue," Gregg explained.

Gregg is responsible on the national level for one of the Agri-Women's newest projects, an oral history of farm women. "It's called 'From Mules To Microwaves.' *Successful Farming* is funding the project. We would like to have the taped interviews by the spring of 1991. If the stories can't be taped, they can be written down."

Gregg isn't sure what will happen with the tapes in the future. "Right now we're just collecting the tapes. If possible we would like to find funding to publish a book later on."

Gregg's goals for Penn Agri Women are more concrete. "We need to increase our visibility and increase our membership. There are a lot of important issues in Pennsylvania such as the wetlands and the Chesapeake Bay. We want to continue our support of farmers in these areas."

Gregg stressed that not all



State Vice President Tressie Caton keeps up with ag news across the nation by reading the American Agri Women Newsletter.

members are involved in all aspects of the organization. "Some members aren't interested in political issues. They help with projects like the Ag Day celebrations. In many counties they arrange the gifts for the ag day baby or help with classroom activities. There is something for

everyone."

Dues for the organization are reasonable. "Ten dollars will cover the state and national dues," Gregg said.

Those interested in joining Penn Agri-Women can contact Carol Ann Gregg, R.D. #2, Box 2180, Grove City, PA 16127.

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