

April Moll And Daughters Operate Steer Farm

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ORWIGSBURG (Schuylkill Co.) — "I'm a farmer not a housewife," April Moll said emphatically.

April isn't exaggerating when she states her profession. With responsibility for 50 Charolais cows and 100 dairy replacements as well as 250-acres of cropland, April is busy from morning to night with farm work.

The work is hard but April isn't complaining. Unlike many wives who got the farm when they married the farmer, April has been dreaming of working on the farm since her youth.

"I think farming is an infection that gets into the blood. You just can't get rid of it," she explained scratching the ear of her golden retriever, Dancer.

Walking toward the bank barn, April reminisced about her love of agriculture. "My parents had a dairy herd and they just couldn't keep me out of the barn. I started with Jerseys and when my parents sold their herd I kept my animals."

"I was 11 years old when the herd went so I had to milk my animals every morning before school. We used the milk to make butter, among other things," Moll said.

Eventually, April's parents, Albert and Mary Jane Green, sold their Strausstown home and moved into the Blue Mountain School District. "I wasn't allowed in the agriculture program at Tulpehocken, but I was welcomed to join the FFA in Blue Mountain. I only had two years but I learned some important things there. I had a chance to weld and I do all our on-farm welding jobs."

It was during her high school years that April received her first Charolais. "There didn't seem to be that much future in dairying for me so I decided to try a beef animal."

After graduation, April spent several years as a milker before entering Penn State in agriculture education.

"I was 24 before I went to Penn State. While I was student teaching I realized that I had to choose between teaching and farming. I wanted to farm."

April and her husband, Frank, started developing their beef herd 13 years ago and bought their own farm two years later. Frank has his own veterinary practice. While many farmers might think a spouse in the medicine business would be an ideal arrangement, April pointed out that it could be a drawback. "Frank has a large animal practice. He is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Even when we make arrangements to do a job together, someone can call with a case of milk fever and he has to leave."

While the Molls do hire a teenager part time, April and her three daughters, Jennie, Melissa and Heather, take care of most of the work themselves.

"The girls feed the calves. We have about 20 dairy calves that we keep in hutches. We buy them from local farmers and raise them. After they are bred we let the farmer who sold the animals to us have the option of buying them back," April said.

Most of the 100 head of replacement animals are grades. "An area farmer has been thinking of retiring and recently sold us some of his registered calves."

Jennie, 11, has already picked out a winner to take to next year's fairs.

"I really want to be a farmer and I want to have a dairy herd," she explained as she led the calf out for a picture. Jennie already has quite a start on a beef herd with four Charolais animals of her own. She also augments her beef and dairy enterprises with horse feeding for a neighbor.

"She really wants to be a farmer," April said. "Her grades at school are excellent and she is planning on going to college. We'll just have to wait and see what she does." Jennie recently joined the Blue Mountain Jr. High FFA program.

Melissa, 10, and Heather, 9, haven't made any career plans. "I'm going to wait another year to decide," Heather declared.

April isn't pushing the farm on her daughters. "I'm not encouraging them and I'm not discouraging them. They have to make up their own minds. They are good help and we're glad to have them getting involved in the farm."

The girls have a couple of incentives for getting their chores done. This summer they earned an Nintendo for helping out. They also earn animals for their work.

That's quite a reward considering the prizes they've earned with their market steers and breeding animals. Melissa topped the Schuylkill Fair Market Steer Show for the second time in three years. "It was a mistake. Mom picked the wrong animal," Melissa explained.

"I try to pick out the animal I think is going to do the best when they're small. Then we give the best steer to a different girl each year. Normally I do pretty well because I know how their mothers did and that tells me who should be best. It was Jennie's year to have the best animal, but it just



April and her daughters, Jennifer, Melissa and Heather, work together to take care of the family's 100 head of dairy replacements and 50 head of Charolais beef.

didn't work out that way," April said.

Jennie did have the top breeding Charolais at the show followed by Heather's reserve.

The barn on the Walnut Lane farm is full of replacements. April points out her paper shredder and skid loader with the same sense of pride most women show in new appliances.

"We're short bedding this year so we're using newspaper," she said. "Neighbors bring us newspapers and we get additional paper from the Times News in Carbon County."

"The shredder works well but it's noisy," Melissa said.

"It's also dusty," her mother added.



April bought her first beef animal 18 years ago. Today she and her daughters have 50 Charolais cows to work with. The Charolais are kept on a 20-acre lot surrounded by residential housing.

April uses a small skid loader for cleaning the barns. "We have a skid loader on the farm here at home to clean the barn and feed the replacements. We have another at the farm with the beef animals. We have to have small ones because of the low ceiling clearance. Sometimes it feels like you're trying to clean the barn

with a spoon but we are able to do a good job in the corners. Using a skid loader for feeding saved us from having to put a feeding system in."

Despite modern conveniences, there is still plenty of manual labor on the farm. Entering a second old barn, April commented "You nev-

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April enjoys working with her beef but admits that she sometimes uses persuasive techniques rather than brawn to work with the big animals. Despite her size she and her daughters manage the herd with minimal help from her husband, Frank.

Homestead Notes