

LINDA WILLIAMS
Bedford Co. Correspondent

EVERETT (Bedford Co.) — Kate Puritt wasn't looking for a farm. When her sister in real estate called to tell her of the picturesque old farm she had discovered in Bedford County, it perked her interest. The price was right.

Kate was about to marry Dale Thompson and the more the two of them talked it over, the more it sounded like a good idea.

Forming a partnership with Kate's mother and several other relatives, the couple purchased the 83 acres and set about earning a living raising sheep, chickens, hogs, rabbits and organic vegetables.

"Our first step was to make ourselves self-sufficient," explains Kate. "This will be our fourth summer. The first three years threw every variety of weather possible at us. The first year we had a drought; the second, it rained all the time. Then, last year, it was so cold that nothing grew at a normal pace."

Despite it all, Dale and Kate have been making it. "But we are still waiting for Kate to win the lottery to finish remodeling the house," Dale laughs.

The couple spends all of their spare time (which is limited) on the house and now have several of the downstairs rooms finished.

Kate and Dale both have backgrounds in farming. Prior to moving to Bedford County, Dale was working for the Volunteer Heifer Project International which is a self-help hunger organization.

Kate was working for the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

"But organic farming is much different," Kate explains. "We use no synthetic chemicals or fertilizer on our vegetables. And, we use no steroids or other methods of treatment on our animals unless they get sick."

"I was used to mixing antibiotics in the hog feed on a regular basis," says Dale. "And, the hogs still got sick."

"But, organic farming is a constant challenge," the couple agrees. "Every year is something different."

Last year, the cucumber bugs were destroying the vegetables and, just as Kate was about to resort to a method which would have killed good bugs along with the bad, nature took over. "The Pennsylvania Leatherbugs arrived and ate the cucumber bugs," Kate laughs.

The farm couple has also discovered that potato bugs will die from eating oat bran. "The bran swells and causes them to die," Dale explains. He jokingly adds that perhaps oat bran should carry a label indicating that, "Oat bran could be hazardous to your health if you are a potato bug."

"This year we are already having a problem with Japanese beetles," Kate says. She is presently putting beneficial nematodes in the ground to help solve this problem. "Nematodes," she explains, "can be good or bad. Something like good and bad cholesterol. Beneficial nematodes will kill only the beetles and not destroy the good insects."

Kate raises all of her own vegetable bedding plants. Beginning in early March she plants the seeds in containers on the glass-enclosed porch of the farmhouse. "They tell us to expect about 50 percent of the seeds to germinate," she says. "This year, I'm sure I had 90 percent."

Plants include all types of vegetables, herbs, and flowers. "I like flowers because I like color," Kate says. She does a lot of companion planting with her herbs.

The Thompson farm includes 71 sheep (41 new lambs this spring), 10 to 20 hogs, and a flock of chickens. The rabbits are their latest venture and are raised in air-conditioned comfort according to the guidelines of that industry.

Sheep are raised with intensive rotational grazing. Dale and Kate plan to try the same thing with their chickens by putting them in movable crates.

Dale has concerns about the over-population of deer in Bedford County. "Nature usually does a good job of thinning down over-population of any species," he says. "When over-population occurs, disease usually strikes."

His big concern with this is that the deer disease is usually "blue tongue," which will also kill sheep. The disease is spread through saliva.

Marketing remains the number one problem with Dale and Kate. "Farmers are terrible marketers," Kate says. "But, we are so busy combating the other problems, we don't have a lot of time for it."

They have a good clientele for both their meat and vegetables from Evansburg to Washington D.C. and the word has been spread primarily by word of mouth. "We tried an ad in a nearby paper and got one call," Kate says. "The word of mouth worked much better."

Last summer the couple worked with local county agent Dick Dale to start a farmer's market in Everett. This year they plan to expand the market to Bedford.

"We would also like to start a marketing co-op to sell our meat and vegetables to restaurants in the Washington D.C. area," Kate says. "There are a lot of small sheep and hog farmers in the area who should be interested."

Eventually they hope to raise enough crops to feed their own animals. "For now, it's tough," Dale says. "The ground on this old farm has been corned to death and we have to start over with crop rotation."

Kate and Dale have recently planted raspberry bushes and they constantly look for other crops which would be of interest. "For instance," Kate says, "Bittersweet brings a good price at craft stands."

Leisure time is something that Dale and Kate find to be almost nonexistent. In addition to all the planting and feeding, Kate

Bedford County Couple Challenge



Kate and Dale are already setting out plants for this summer's vegetable crop.

GOOD DEALS *from Good Dealers*

Your Full-Service John Deere Dealers

ADAMSTOWN EQUIPMENT INC.
Mohnton, PA
(near Adamstown)
215-484-4391

BARTRON SUPPLY, INC.
Tunkhannock, PA
717-838-4011

CARLYLE & MARTIN, INC.
Hagerstown, MD
301-733-1873

CLUGSTON FARM EQUIPMENT
Needmore, PA
717-573-2215

CLUGSTON AG & TURF, INC.
Chambersburg, PA
717-263-4103

DEERFIELD AG & TURF CENTER, INC.
Watsontown, PA
717-538-3557

ENFIELD EQUIPMENT INC.
Whiteford, MD
301-452-5252

EVERGREEN TRACTOR CO., INC.
Lebanon, PA
717-272-4641

FINCH SERVICES-HANOVER INC.
Hanover, PA
717-632-2345

A.B.C. GROFF, INC.
New Holland, PA
717-354-4191

GUTSHALL'S INC.
Carlisle, PA
717-249-2313

ROBERT G. HAMPTON, INC.
Shiloh, NJ
609-451-9520

I.G. SALES
Silverdale, PA
215-257-5136

KERMT K. KISTLER INC.
Lynnport, PA
215-298-2011

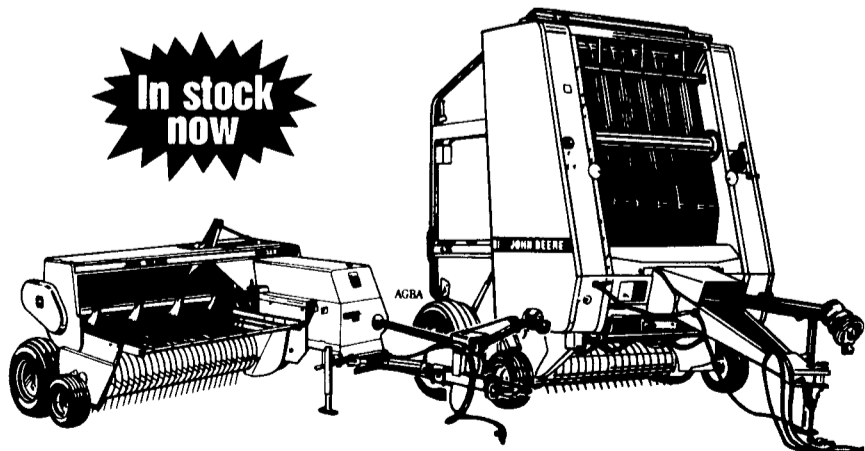
LANDIS BROS. INC.
Lancaster, PA
717-291-1046

LEHIGH AG EQUIPMENT
Wescosville, PA
215-398-2553

JOHN DEERE

**SQUARE BALES OR ROUND,
YOU'RE IN THE BEST SHAPE
WITH JOHN DEERE**

In stock now



■ Look over '5' Series Round Balers and '8' Series Square Balers—the complete and completely advanced baler line

■ See the 435 and 535 Round Balers that can both surface wrap and twine tie

■ See square balers with the hay control to produce bales that stack like bricks

■ Four round baler models, 750- to 2000-pound bales. Three 14x18-inch square balers, one 16x18-inch square baler



LEADERSHIP AT WORK™