

# Silent Partner Becomes Respected Cattlewoman

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 UNIONTOWN, Md. — Runnymede sits like a pastoral paradise near historic Uniontown, Maryland. Neatly manicured and lovingly cared for, the 165-acre farm is a picture-perfect family operation.

Virginia "Ginny" Lambert and her husband, Harry "Buzz" Lambert, and her mother, Grace Ownings, tend to the farm, perpetuating the agricultural heritage at Runnymede established by Ginny's father and grandfather in 1942.

"I started going to the sales with my father, Theodore Ownings, in 1979. That's when I really got started," recalled Ginny. Like father, like daughter, Ginny learned the cattle business quickly by helping her father.

"I always was the silent partner with Daddy," she explained. "After he passed away, I came out of the woodwork." Ginny and her mother had a difficult decision to make that April — whether or not

to continue raising steers. "Dad died on April 8, 1988. We got cattle the following Friday," said Ginny.

More than a decade and a thousand steers after she started, Runnymede is not only an efficiently run operation but also a way of life.

"To me, April is Christmas," said Ginny. When the first green grass of spring blankets the rolling meadows of Runnymede, Ginny heads for the sale barns of Virginia in search of 100 to 125 steers.

"I go to the graded sales. They usually have better quality cattle," said Ginny. The cattlewoman knows from her years of experience that the "medium 1" grade are the best for her. The markets of Culpepper, Winchester, Marshall, and Madison, Virginia offer graded cattle in lots of 50 to 60. "As a rule, they're fairly uniform. We buy steers at an average weight of 650 to 700 pounds.

Even though Ginny raised a Hereford for a project as a child, she now appreciates the qualities



Ginny Lambert keeps a close eye on the herd via a 4-wheeler.

that white-faced black cattle offer. "I like crossbreeds better. They gain weight better and we have very little sickness," she reported.

Ginny runs her operation efficiently, down to every detail. "I bought 66 (head) in Marshall at 8 p.m. I stopped along the way home and called Keilholtz Trucking in Thurmont, they hauled for my dad, and at 1:30 a.m., the steers walked off the truck.

At Runnymede, the steers are kept on the 125 acres of pasture until October when they are sold to an order buyer to be placed in a finishing operation.

"They never see the barn except when they are unloaded, loaded, or if they need medical attention," she said. The white bank barn is usually filled with hay, but this year the hay that they made on shares of 21 acres was needed for feed. "We had this barn stuffed with hay before the drought. It was full, but we fed several thousand bales. We fed 40 bales per day from June to September," said Ginny.

The barn is Ginny's domain at Runnymede. "Buzz gave me an automatic head gate for Christmas last year, and I got a generator the year before that," she recalled.

The barnyard wall bears the date 1910. And, it also bears Ginny's initials.

"She put the barnyard wall back together last year," said Buzz proudly.

"Frost had gotten into it." Ginny said she started putting her initials on her handiwork



Ginny Lambert, left, with her mother, Grace Owings, pauses under the shade of a huge oak tree at Runnymede.

around the farm — a tradition her father began years ago.

Runnymede is tended to carefully by the whole family. The long lane that leads to the homestead if flanked by pastures full of free-grazing steers. Curious bovine momentarily shift their attention from the lush grass to see who is driving through their pasture. There is "Bubby, Moldy, P.T. (named after the manager of the Winchester stockyard), Moldy and the Preacher who spends more time on his knees eating under the fence." The lane eventually leads to the lovely white farmhouse, where huge trees stand as sentries in the yard.

Runnymede presents such an

eye-pleasing landscape, that it was selected as a site for the filming of a Quaker Oats cereal commercial. The sun rises behind the barn every morning and floods the big country kitchen with golden light — just the effect the producers were looking for.

"It was like sitting there waiting for a baby to be born," recalled Ginny. "It was a cold morning, and they had 20 minutes to shoot that scene. The commercial ran for about 6 months and Runnymede received nationwide exposure."

A sign at the entry announces, "Pet Walking Area." It is a reminder to visitors to drive cautiously, and yield the right-of-way to the

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75-year-old Grace Owings holds Ralsin, one of the many resident kittens at Runnymede.



Ginny and her husband, Harry "Buzz" Lambert, have seen more than 100 head of steers pass through the loading chute where they are perched.

## Homestead Notes