

Move Doesn't Lessen Family's Commitment To Farming

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NEW PARK (York Co.) —

Deb Rohrbaugh's first date with her husband Allen was a fitting opening for her career today as a dairy farm partner.

"He picked me up in a cattle truck and we went to auction," chuckles this York County farm woman. "We probably dropped off calves; I don't really remember." She does remember that the end destination of the date, though, was a game of miniature golf.

Appropriately, Deb and Allen first met at an FFA party held at the Leader farm near New Freedom, where his father, George, was herdsman for the registered Guernsey operation. Allen was just two when the family began their 25-year association with the Leader herd. He grew up there, helping with the cattle and exhibiting Guernseys as a York County 4-H'er.

Deb spent her childhood in the Rinely area, where the Hyson family tended beef cattle and crops on their general farm. She, too, was an active 4-H member, winning county and state awards in photography and representing Pennsylvania at Club Congress in Chicago.

By the time Deb and Allen were considering marriage, his "number" came up near the top of the selective service Vietnam War draftee lottery list. Allen instead enlisted in the Army in 1972, leaving within a day of Deb's own departure for a 4-H exchange trip to Canada.

"I cried the whole way there," she recalls.

They married after his early training, with a wedding ceremony on a Saturday and a departure Sunday for San Antonio where Allen was temporarily based. Less than three weeks later, after another relocation to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Deb received word that her mother had died.

While the frequent, distant moves and emotional upheaval of such sudden changes might have caused problems for some newlyweds, Deb and Allen found strength as a couple to face them together.

A medic with a paratrooper unit, Allen also enjoyed working with the base's vet clinic and



Allen and Deb Rohrbaugh, with Scott, are firmly committed to the dairy industry as a way of life and a lifestyle in

which to raise a family. Absent from the picture is daughter Jill, who was attending school.

using his animal knowledge in caring for the clinic's clientele, primarily horses. Deb worked as a seamstress at the nearby Wrangler shirt company. They remained at Fort Bragg until his discharge in 1975.

Early in their marriage, the Rohrbaughs discussed the possibility of Allen's returning to the dairy business. But, on their return, they both landed jobs at BMY, a large York manufacturer of armored, motorized field equipment for the military. And, they built a new house near Deb's home.

Still, there was "something" missing in their lives.

"Allen just wasn't happy working in the factory," remembers Deb.

"And, there was no guarantees that we would be able to keep these jobs. We were on strike for awhile, and never could make that back up. We could have lost job security at any time," she said.

The Rohrbaughs began looking for a suitable farm to rent - and found one just 10 miles from home. With the Leader herd's dispersal, George, his wife Audrey and their youngest son Darryl,

were interested in joining Allen and Deb on a family operation. By renting the farm and buildings, and buying their own cows and equipment, the Rohrbaughs were able to realize their dream of dairying on their own.

Located on the Pennsylvania-Maryland border, the Charles Birch farm, which the Rohrbaughs rent, sports a Mason-Dixon survey marker on the property. The buildings are on the Maryland side, so daughter Jill, 10, attends elementary school in nearby Norrisville. But their mailing address is Pennsylvania-based.

Despite some seasons of drought and the recent lowest milk prices they've ever received, Deb is totally committed to farming and the dairy industry.

"I can't remember ever questioning Allen's wish to dairy farm," says this ag supporter and enthusiast.

"But I did cry the day I left my new house," she confesses with a smile.

Being able to stay home with their children, Jill and Scott, 2, has been a family farming dividend that Deb really appreciates. She learned to milk, handles the farm

books, recordkeeping, and runs errands.

Deb Rohrbaugh has also become something of a farm activist, primarily through her work with the York County and Pennsylvania Farmers Associations. She credits fellow PFA enthusiast Pat Sueck with spurring her interest.

"I opened my mouth," Deb says of a county farmers association meeting she attended where a lack of volunteers for an activity was being discussed. "I said I hadn't been asked to help."

"I got asked," she jokes of Pat's ability to enlist others to become involved. She helped at the association's annual York farm tour, then was appointed county women's committee chairman. Local involvement led to participation in statewide PFA events, including annual meetings and women's activities. Deb now writes, publishes, and mails the county association's monthly newsletter.

"It's something I can do at home, and I do like to do it," she says of the informative mailings she handles. "I use items from here and there, and PFA sends out materials for newsletter use. It isn't hard to find information to include."

Since Scott was born two years ago, Deb has relinquished some farm chores, like milking, but continues her participation in farm and community activities by taking her friendly, outgoing son along. A recent move by PFA to provide babysitting services at state activities has made participation for young mothers easier. In fact, if organizations want young people to be involved, this farm

woman activist believes they need to seriously look at providing facilities for care of young children.

"When Scott was six-months-old, I took him along to spring conference. At the Hershey convention, babysitting was part of the service. I thanked them and let them know how important it is. I like to go but can't unless there is something like that available," she adds.

State activities have been the source of many friendships for Deb, who has become acquainted with farmers from around Pennsylvania. A few of those familiar faces will soon become neighbors.

In March, the three families of the Rohrbaugh's Deal Holsteins plan to relocate to a 200-acre farm in Somerset County. Because land prices in York County have become prohibitive for dairying purposes, the Rohrbaughs searched for several years across surrounding states for a suitable farm to purchase.

"Having been with the Army, we know we can live somewhere else. We also already have friends in Somerset County that we've made through PFA," explains Deb.

The 125-freestall and parlor setup is not too different from the facilities in which they presently milk, so herd adjustment should be fairly easy. Computer feeders are in place, equipment on which Deb hopes she and her sister-in-law Denise can be helpful.

Denise is presently employed in computer work with a Maryland firm. Deb took a 20-hour introductory course a few years ago with the York Business Insti-

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Deb Rohrbaugh and son Scott, 2, take advantage of a warm fall afternoon to operate some "farm equipment."

Homestead Notes