

Keith Wins National Young Farmers Competition

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Lancaster Farming Staff
STRAUSSTOWN (Berks Co.) — Mary Ann Keith is talkative, outgoing, friendly and informed, according to many who have been in her company.

Almost a natural spokesperson. Speech judges apparently also agree — the young agricultural lending agent and director on the board of the Pennsylvania State University Dairy Sciences Club can talk effectively.

Recently she won the national Young Farmer's Education Association Spokesperson for Agriculture contest, beating out two other finalists in a showdown in Des Moines, Iowa, that Keith almost didn't make.

Because of heavy snows, she missed a Friday flight and instead her family helped drive her to Pittsburgh to catch a flight onto Des Moines.

At the Des Moines airport, she stepped out of the plane to greet some people from the convention, just in time to be rushed to a waiting car and be taken to the convention center. She walked on the stage just as the last of the contestants finished and she was to go on.

Her speech was prepared. She said she wasn't nervous.

"It's easier to talk to 800 or 1,000 people than to get up in front of your own family," she said, laughing.

Her topic was, "The Importance of Farmer in Our World Today."

She started out with a short but effective introduction that provided the talk with a personal and easily understandable setting — the dinner table.

From a brief description of the home-raised foods she and her family ate during that meal, she said that during the course of dinner table discussion, a comment was made about the future.

The comment was that with newer and newer technologies being developed, there is an apparent lack of need for the farmer in the future, because people can be fed with artificially manufactured, nutritive pills or tablets.

Then through a description of what a modern farmer actually is, compared to the antiquated image, and through a quick outline of the functions and interdependence of economies on agricultural production, she argued against the portent of the end of the farmer.

In fact, she argued for a stronger need in the future for the strongly-educated and practical farmer.

"Agriculture drives even the industries of steel, chemicals, plastic, glass and especially food service," she said in the speech. "Everyone in the world is somehow affected by our friends who work the land."

"In countries where proper farming methods are not adequate, the standard of living is very low and thousands go hungry," she said.

"Thailand is an important example in my own mind because I lived there for a year. Thais have very little knowledge of modern farming practices and rely a great deal on other countries, such as our United States, to survive," she said.

Later in the speech, near the end, she reverts back to the dining room with her family and said that the meal conversation turned. "We are

no longer discussing the insignificant occupation of farming, but an important profession in our world today. We are in turn, no longer the greedy consumer.

"The farmer is ultimately responsible for our existence and comfort, and we are more aware of our dependence on the products and grateful for what the farmer provides."

She finished the speech in five minutes or less, as is the requirement, and took questions for 10 minutes from the judges.

She said she was told to be prepared for any questions, because the judges may not necessarily be farming enthusiasts, or they may have personal arguments with the farming industry.

But Keith shined. Her modesty is not embarrassment, but acknowledgement that she has been blessed with a certain talent for talk. She doesn't take credit for it, as though she could have created the talent.

However, she attributes the refinement of her speaking and communicative abilities as the result of being active — in 4-H, FFA, high school, college, dairy clubs, etc., and being and staying informed. She has invested energy in getting and sharing knowledge.

The effectiveness of her communications is a result of practicing, which isn't just talking, she said, but is just as much listening — to others, and to herself.

To qualify for the national contest, she got a bye because she qualified from speaking as several meetings, doing several interviews, speaking in front of groups, and writing letters to the governor, lieutenant governor and a town major.

A speech she gave to the Pennsylvania State Grange, and later to the national Grange in Denver, Colo., was about changing the Grange. Her speech to the PSU Dairy Science Club was on being an agricultural lender.

She also won the state Grange speech contest and recognition at the national contest.

Her involvement in communications through the Young Farmers Association was intensive. She said she and the other contestants participated in a two-day media blitz about the convention while in Des Moines. The blitz included writing newspaper, radio and television releases, including being part of live broadcasts.

There were three judges for the Young Farmers contest — one representing the industry, one representing non-farming concerns, and the other was an agricultural radio personality.

Although she could probably speak on behalf of other interests, she said her desire is to speak on behalf of agriculture. Being raised on a commercial dairy farm near Lake Raystown, she said she grew up with a love of farming that has continued and grown.

Her parents, Harry and Joan (pronounced Joe-Ann), and brother John are in partnership on the 100-acre farm. They rent an additional 200 acres, have 50 milking Holsteins and raise their own replacements.

After graduating from Penn State College, she worked for the ag lending team at Lebanon Valley National Bank, and then more than

a year ago, she took a position serving as an agricultural lender for Mid-State Bank, New Enterprise.

"I'll do anything to support the agricultural cause," she said. "It's been the backbone of my life."

The Young Farmers association was started to provide continuing education to the rural, mostly agricultural Americans of the past. The number of local chapters has been diminishing as the number of school districts cease to support the organization, citing low numbers of farmers.

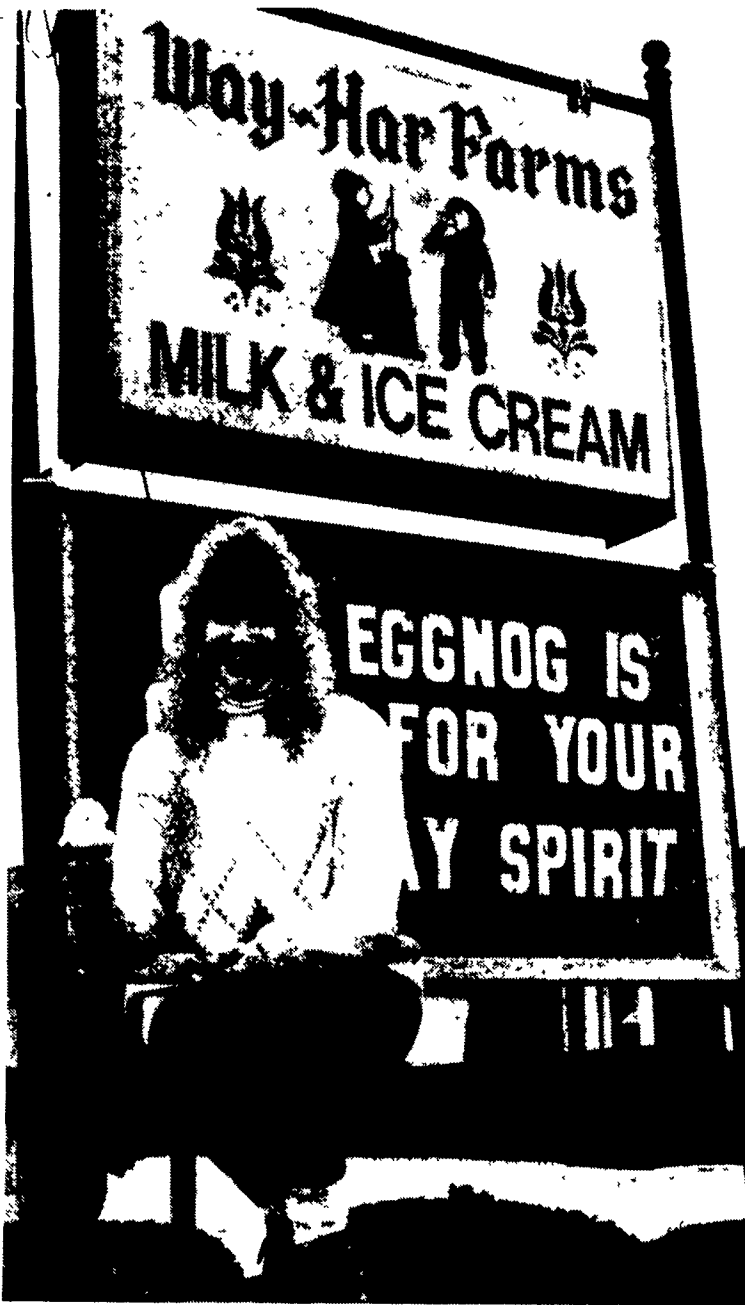
However, Keith said the importance of the organization isn't diminishing at all.

"The organization is very important. It's an educational organization that provides continuing education. That's something I think every farmer needs, especially the way the world's changing, and this organization provides the opportunity to keep up with the changes."

In the meantime, with her schedule full with work, and helping out with evening milkings and some weekend duty at the home farm where she keeps her three milking and three heifer registered Holsteins, she said she would still like to find a place to use her speaking skills for more benefit to agriculture.

Currently, she co-coaches the Huntingdon County Holstein Association dairy bowl team with John Andrew Foster III and is involved with the Blair County Chamber of Commerce Farm-City Committee. She also holds the office of Ceres in the state Grange.

In addition, she is a member of a sign language group that puts on demonstrations for church and civic groups and signs for plays and songs.



Mary Ann Keith enjoys promoting agriculture. Here she poses with ice cream in front of Way-Har Farms store in Berks County. A friend of the family, she used some vacation to visit.



HAPPENINGS

Lancaster County's Seven Horse & Pony Clubs Hold Recognition Banquet

The December banquet culminated a year's work for Lancaster County's seven horse & pony clubs — Boots & Saddles, Broken Bit, Production, Rough Riders, Saddle Cinches, Sequoia Riders, and Stable Mates.

The year included community service projects, clinics, horse shows, and competing on the county, district, and state levels.

Guests for the evening were commissioner James Huber, chairman, Board of County Commissioners; Mr. & Mrs. Jay Irwin, retired Lancaster County extension director; and Mr. & Mrs. Ray Brubaker, Farm & Home Center, where the banquet was held with the following results:

Club Awards

Three Years Or More Perfect Attendance: Becky Preiss (6 yrs.) Kelly Frybarger, Jodeli Stahl, Michelle Miller (8 yrs.), Carl Stout.

Outstanding Teen Leaders: Becky Preiss, Eileen Holm, Nathan Stoltzfus, Tina Henry, Lavonne Lehman, Kar Moyer, Matthew Stark.

High Sponsorship: Samara Shuster-Edelson (Jr.), Carl Hoover (Jr.), Lisa Pannebecker (Jr.), the Oberholzer's (Jr's) Jesslyn, Heather Brian Brent & Delmar, Becky Preiss (Sr.).

Most Improved First Year Member: Cori Rife, Lynsday Holton, Mike Hess, Kate Pfahl, Brooke Leggat, Gabrielle Grumelli.

Most Improved Second Year Member: Jennifer Talbot, Maureen Gerhard, Samara Shuster-Edelson, Abby Dagen, Erika Bender, John Snyder, Karen Wertz, Greg Paxson.

Outstanding Member In Final Year: Becky Preiss, Eileen Holm, Kim Kettering,



4-H Sportsmanship Award; from left, Heather Moyer (Junior) Litzitz; Karl Moyer (Senior), Manheim.

Bobbi Miller, Michelle Miller.

Best Demonstration: Samara Shuster-Edelson, Kelli Sullivan, Robert Shuster-Edelson, Lisa Pannebecker, Sara Harris, Kerra Allen, Karl Moyer, Pam Lehman, Heather Oberholzer, Jessica Pfahl, Kirsten Kauffman, Jenny Long.

Trial Ride Awards: Barry Gochnauer, Sarah Haynes, Angie Moore, John Snyder, Ellie Gage, Connie Stanley (Jr.'s), Kate Aton, Kristy Frybarger, Becky Aukamp, Camille Long (Sr.'s).

Outstanding Parents: Georgie Heisey, Donnie Frybarger, Jeff Edelson, Dolly Shuster, Janet Aukamp, Laverne Oberholzer, Diann & Gerald Kormos, Betti Grumelli, Roxann Stanley, Dianne Paxson.

Sportsmanship: Elizabeth Heisey, Lori

Hamish, Roy Haldeman, Sandy Peterson, Jeremy Shelly, Jennifer Paxson (Jr.'s), Bobbie Miller, Michelle Miller, Jessica Hill (Sr.'s).

Best Project Book: (Horses Are Fun) Kim Wenger, Nichole Rose, Jennifer Brandt, Sarah Paetz. (Novice) Tim Goodman, Robert Shuster-Edelson, Jessica Althouse, Lyndsy Holton, Brent Oberholzer, Karen Craven, Greg Paxson. (Tenderfoot) Jennifer Goodman, Melissa Meiskey, Kerra Allen, Gabriel Bowman, Alison Longenecker, Karen Wertz (Junior) Samara Shuster-Edelson, Becky Aukamp, Heather Oberholzer, Kyle Kettering, Carl Hoover. (Senior) Becky Preiss, Lon Hamish, Tina Henry, Kerry Moyer, Ellie Gage, Connie Stanley. (Advanced) Eileen Holm, Kim Kettering, Bobbi Miller, Giovanna

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