

# State Representative Balances Family, Farm, And Political Responsibilities

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

HOST (Berks Co.) — Winding down the lane that leads to Deitschland Farm, visitors catch a glimpse of Polled Herefords grazing on a distant hillside. Rolling acres of cleared land and stands of timber rise above the stone farm house nestled in the hollow. A person can almost feel themselves say ah'hhh and relax away from the pressure of schedules and too many people.

But the Millers who live in the stone farmhouse with a brook rippling underneath it, lead no leisurely lifestyle.

Sheila is the state representative for Berks 129th district. Her husband Mike labors for a Purina dealership. Eleven-year-old Emilie, the state Polled Hereford Princess, has a scheduled filled with cattle competitions, school, 4-H, and Girl Scout activities, clarinet lessons, and gymnastics. On top of all that, the family farms about 150 acres and raises 25 brood cows plus young stock.

It isn't easy balancing political, family, and farming responsibilities, but Mike explains, "It's all in doing what you know you have to do. The way I look at it, this is our choice. Nobody is making us do

this. It's what we choose."

Although Mike supports his wife's decision to be active in politics, he wants no parts of it himself. To some, it may seem that he takes a backseat to his wife's public image.

He said with boyish wit, "It never bothers me being known as Mr. Sheila Miller. She was popular before I knew her, and after I met her — she became a lot more popular."

Sheila portrays a gracious, refined image adept at handling both satisfied and disgruntled constituents.

Raised on a Dauphin County commercial beef farm, Sheila had no political aspirations. She enrolled as a pre-med student in college, but soon realized she preferred animals and the outdoors, so she switched to general ag studies at Penn State.

After graduating cum laude, Sheila worked for a number of years for the USDA Soil Conservation. When Mike and his dad who were farming in Adams County decided to build a pond on their farm, they called the Conservation office. Sheila designed the pond and a romance bloomed. She and Mike married and shared the dream



Farmers got an advocate in the state House of Representatives. Sheila is one of only six of the house's 203 members involved in farming.

to farm together. It took several years of scouting out farm sales in surrounding counties before they

found the 63-acre farm on which they now reside.

"It was grown up in brambles, all the barns had collapsed, and the only structure left standing on the property was a log house — and that needed new wiring and plumbing," Sheila said.

But Sheila saw the potential. After a quick call to her husband, Mike gave her the go ahead to make an offer for the farm she described.

The Millers purchased the property not because they wanted to reside in Berks County but the farm met their criteria: It was affordable. It had trees, land, streams, and hills.

Like many young couples starting in farming, the Millers put most of their time and money into establishing the farming operation and

only minimal repairs to the house. With the help of family members and friends, they cleared the brush and brambles, dismantled a bank barn located 10 miles away and rebuilt it in the VPI (Virginia Polytechnical Institute) style on their property.

The rebuilding took every weekend for at least a year, but the couple did it in stages as they could afford it.

With Sheila's background in conservation, the gullies and major erosion on the farm was stopped with contour farming methods. To keep manure from running into the streams, the cattle were allowed limited access to the streams.

"I've always been terrible at backing wagons, so we designed the barn to drive straight through."

(Turn to Page B4)



Rep. Sheila Miller with husband Mike, daughter Emilie (who is the state Polled Hereford Princess), and puppy Bonnie enjoy the outdoors their farm offers.



The Miller's 63-acre farm encompasses hills and valleys in all directions. They also rent additional land to bring the total acreage farmed to about 150.

# HOMESTEAD NOTES