

# Woman Farmer Finds Solutions To Problems Created By Machinery And Manure

**Candace S. Burke**  
Burke's Little Twenty  
Sheep Farm

**FREEPORT (Armstrong Co.)**—My mother, a dairy farmer's daughter who hated farm life, ran away to the city, married, and raised her daughters happily in suburban Pittsburgh. Much to my mother's dismay, I dreamed of the country life and wanted to farm more than anything else in the world.

Thirteen years ago, I talked my very city-bred husband and two small sons into buying a small farm in Armstrong County. They didn't realize at the time I had every intention of farming. My husband Jim figured I would get a few animals and that would be it. When I told Jim one day that I could see the land covered with sheep, he replied, "You never told me you wanted to farm!" I did tell him many times — he was just not listening or believing.

Jim had a very demanding job as a data processing manager, sometimes working long hours into the evening and on weekends. So, as far as Jim was concerned, he did not need another job. Jim felt that a large, comfortable, riding mower was all this farm needed.

My uncle, who owned the family dairy farm in Bedford, knew my Jim was going to be a little problem with this farming idea. So my uncle urged me to go to my county Soil Conservation Service office and ask for help.

I walked into Armstrong County's Soil Conservation Service and proudly announced I had 30 ewes and I wanted to farm. Despite that introduction, a young understanding woman technician greeted me eagerly with news of an exciting new program called "rotational grazing." She urged me to attend an upcoming meeting.

I went to my first "Project Grass" quarterly meeting in Somerset the fall of 1995. I was fascinated over the concept of rotational grazing and felt then and there this would be the solution to my problem.

During the previous years, I had been making hay mostly myself. This was very hard because I could afford only old machinery that loved to constantly break



**Thirteen years after purchasing the farm, Candace built a successful farm business by running 100 show ewes and lambs through paddocks on the farm and by marketing fresh lamb, lamb kolbasa, and lamb salami.**

### Water Quality Benefits Of Rotational Grazing Pennsylvania Association Of Conservation Districts

By converting cropland into pastureland, the Potential for soil erosion is reduced. Row crops like corn are most prone to erosion since more soil is exposed year round.

Reduced pesticide use on pastures means less chance of pesticides reaching groundwater surface waters.

Manure spread by grazing animals on pastureland provides nitrogen phosphorus and potassium for new grass growth. Additional fertilizers may not be necessary depending on soil conditions, animals numbers, and location of watering points.

Properly designed, rotational grazing systems encourage a fairly even distribution of manure, thereby aiding soil fertility throughout the paddocks.

down in the middle of hay season, usually when I had a field to cut. My sons were too young to be of much help loading and unloading hay, and Jim was, of course at work.

Frustrated with me and tired of fixing the baler late at night, Jim would say, "Make believe that baler is your sewing machine — you can fix that!"

To me, that big red baler with the bad notter was a pain I could do without. The idea of running animals on the land through paddocks, letting them cut the grass instead of me, grew more and more enticing. Rotational grazing seemed like a great idea.

Ten years later, that great idea has become reality. I run 100 large show ewes and lambs through the

paddocks while they mow and fertilize the pastures as they go. The sheep are grazing the paddocks starting sometimes as early as April 15 to as late as December 1.

This size of farm could never produce enough storage hay to feed that number of ewes, but seven to eight months out of the year, I do not have to make hay or buy it. And running sheep on the land will yield me more profit (pounds of meat) at the end of the year per acre than hay. Even in dry spells, I may have to feed hay to 50 percent of the flock, but financially, I am still ahead of the game because I do not have to feed 100 percent of the flock.

Over the last couple of years, another problem arose with the increase in my flock size. Manure. All of our ewes would come into the barn to water, rest, and just loaf around, depositing more manure with each visit they made. The wet, mucky buildup of manure in the barnyard caused hoof problems and made disease control a challenge. As an associate director of Armstrong County Conservation District, I also understood the danger of water pollution from the buildup of nitrates around the barn and barnyard.

The solution was relatively simple. Keep the sheep where you can use the manure's nutrients — in the grassy paddocks. With the watering systems placed in each paddock, the sheep spread their manure throughout, virtually eliminating the need to add commercial fertilizers to the fields, and putting my manure spreader into semi retirement. I found that the marriage of rotational grazing and nutrient management was beneficial for both my sheep and my business.

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**Raised in the city, Candace Burke longed to farm. Although her city-bred husband purchased the farm for her, he was too busy to assist her with hay making and machinery repairs. By using rotational grazing and nutrient management, Candace found a solution.**

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