



The Lovell family: Melana, Angela, Laura and Annette stand behind their parents, Marian, holding two-week-old grandson Adam, and Ralph, holding 17-month-old grandson Andrew.

Love Of Agriculture Ties This Family Together

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LINDEN (Lycoming Co.) —
Sitting in the Lovell's rural home surrounded by three generations, one couldn't help but feel the warmth and love that flowed from their hearts.

Like many close-knit families, that love is evident in their almost constant banter.

But for the Ralph and Marian Lovell, their four girls, Annette, Laura, Angela and Melana and now Laura's sons, Andrew, 1½ and Adam, 2 weeks, something else is very important. That something is agriculture.

Agriculture has been a way of life for the Lovells for many years. Ralph grew up on a neighboring dairy farm while Marian grew up on a dairy farm in Tioga County. After the two were married, Ralph milked cows on his home farm for several years until he got the opportunity to purchase the farm just up the road and full-time work as a mail carrier.

That was in 1978, the same year that their third girl, Angela, was born.

At that time they had five beef animals and would raise a lamb to butcher every year. They would also raise a couple of hogs to butcher.

Today they have about 30 beef cows, steers, and calves. They also have 28 breeding ewes, of which all but three gave birth to twins this year on their Maple Spring Farm.

They didn't actually get into the sheep business on a larger scale until Annette had her first 4-H market lamb project in 1980.

"I didn't like coming home to an empty barn," said Annette, "so that's how we got into the breeding sheep. The third year I got four sheep, they were Annie, Fannie Franie and Janie. I sold two as market projects and the other two were my first 4-H breeding ewes."

To expand and upgrade their

flock, the Lovells started buying bred ewes at the Keystone International Livestock Exhibition and through other sales.

Annette started showing Suffolks, but after her sister Laura started showing, the family decided to start a flock of Hampshires so the two girls wouldn't have to compete in the show ring.

The projects kept getting more and more involved as more family members joined in the fun.

"The first year we went (Annette) just took her one market lamb. And you're down there the whole week with one lamb. So then she got a Polled Hereford heifer, so then we had two animals at the fair the next year. And then we were like, well we might as well take some more . . . and then of course Laura got into it and it's snowballed," said Marian.

The highest number of animals they've shown at the fair in one year was over 30 including the breeding and market ewes, market hogs, and steers and other beef animals.

When Angela was old enough to begin showing lambs, she chose Dorsets so again the three would not have to compete. As Annette grew past the 4-H age, Angela took over her flock of Suffolks and slowly moved away from the Dorsets.

Melana's choice was easy. She wanted to show the Hampshires, and since Laura's 4-H career was over, she took over Laura's projects.

At age 12, Melana has many years of 4-H showmanship ahead of her in their Bottle Run 4-H Club. But the end of her 4-H years won't be the end of the Lovell's involvement in the market and breeding projects.

"We've figured out that Melana's last year will be Andrew's first year," said Marian, with a laugh. "But his mom says the sheep have to stay here!"

Showing the animals was not all fun and games, however. Each girl had definite ideas of how to improve their sheep flocks or beef herds or market hogs.

"They try hard, and they work hard at it," said Marian. "I can remember going home at the end of a fair and already they're thinking, well next year, we're going to do this. They're already planning the week they leave the year before!"

They also try to pick out the best animals.

"It's getting harder and harder to pick out a good animal. You have to go farther and farther to get one," said Marian.

Searching for good breeding stock has led them to Ohio and even Maine.

Angela's reserve champion breeding Dorset came from Springfield, Maine, said Annette. "I guess that's the farthest anything's ever come."

"We keep trying to get better rams," said Marian.

Annette said, "We like to show our own sheep especially for our own fair. We sell some to other counties too. We've had champions at Tioga, Clinton, and Bloomsburg fairs. These are animals that we've sold to other 4-H'ers."



Angela and Andrew give some extra nourishment to "Hercules," who tipped the scales at birth at 20 pounds. His twin sister "Zena" weighed in at a not so little 15 pounds.

The family not only has enjoyed many successes in the show ring, but they've also reached out through their involvement in 4-H to help others get started.

"This year we expect to have about 30 kids (in our club). Lots of kids work hard. There are some who are into the breeding program, too. If you don't have a strong breeding program, you won't have a good market program. Having parent support is real important. 4-H is a family thing. You only get out of it what you put in," said Marian.

In addition to the daily chores of feeding and cleaning up after their sheep, the girls are learning more and more about fitting with every year that goes by.

"We're slick shearing the market lambs now, so it's not so much work. But with the breeding sheep, there's a lot of carding and hand shearing. You can do them half a dozen times if you have time," said Marian.

Because many of the veterinarians in the area are not familiar with sheep, the Lovells have

learned to do most of their veterinary work themselves.

"We learned to do a lot of our own work. We do the vaccinating, foot trimming, shearing . . . If there's a difficult birth, we do it. Whatever needs done, we do it," said Marian, "except we can't do C-sections."

The Lovell's facilities are not fancy, but they adequately protect their sheep from the wind and sometimes frigid temperatures that come with spring lambing.

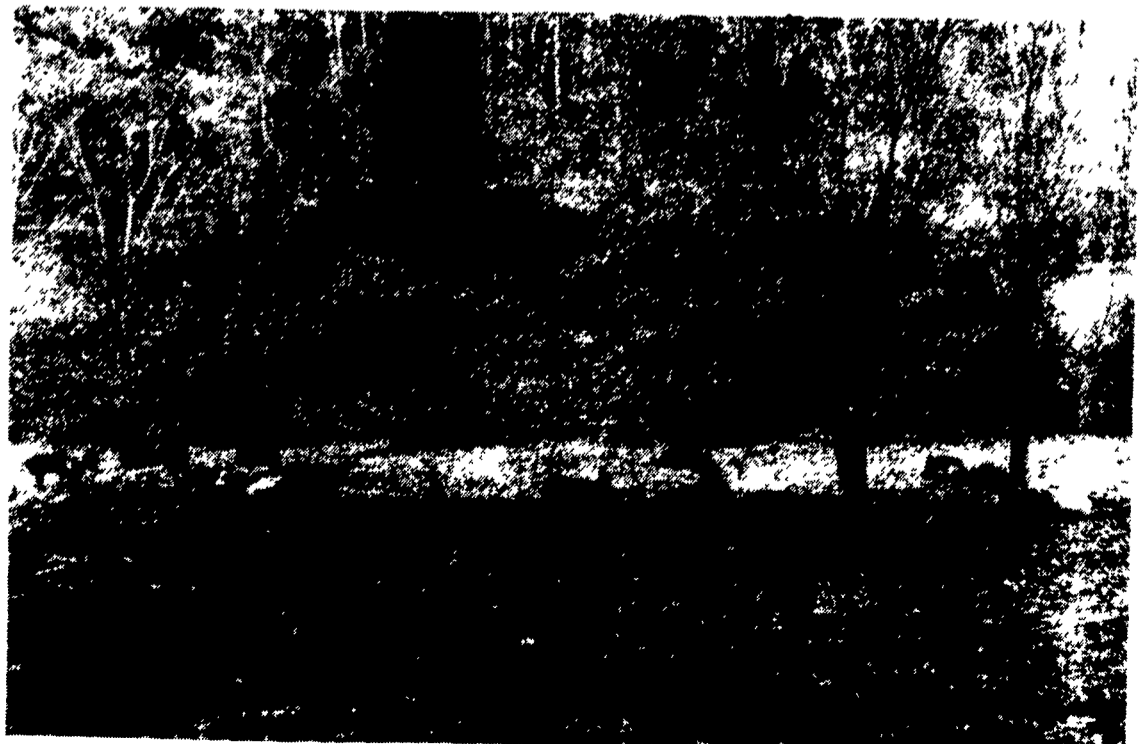
"At birth we give them lamb starter with vitamins, they get an ear tag and we iodine their navels and make sure they get colostrum," said Marian.

This year the weather has helped a great deal because it has been so mild.

Angela is quick to point out, however that regardless of the work to be done, one of the goals is always to have fun.

As time has passed, each has sister carved out her own niche in the operation and they've continued their involvement in agriculture.

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Maple Spring farm is also home to 30 beef cows and their calves plus one horse.

HOMESTEAD NOTES