

# Pennsylvania Alternate Dairy Princess Values Growing Up On Farm

**JAYNE SEBRIGHT**  
Lancaster Farming Staff

**WATTSBURG (Erie Co.)** — Although 18-year-old Amanda Gilkinson may not always like cutting after-school fun short to do evening chores, she believes that the experiences she has had on her parent's dairy farm more than make up for the things she missed because of the farm.

"Growing up on a farm has taught me not to take things for granted," said Amanda. "It's taught me a different set of values than most people my age have. It has also opened so many opportunities to me."

One of the opportunities living on a dairy farm opened up to Amanda was the chance to

become the 1999-2000 Pennsylvania Alternate Dairy Princess.

"Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be dairy princess," said Amanda. "My friends and I would always go to the pageants and watch the newest dairy princess in awe."

Amanda comes from a 75-head dairy farm in Erie County, just three miles from New York. Her parents, Ralph and Michele, both work on the farm, which is called MI-RA-CREST.

Amanda's responsibilities on the farm include taking care of the calves and helping with other chores when she is needed. She also helps milk when her father, who serves on both the Pennsylvania DHIA and Genex

Board of Directors, is away at meetings.

Amanda's parents both grew up on dairy farms and knew that the farm was the only place where they wanted to raise Amanda and her 13-year-old brother Stephen.

"Being with my family is my favorite part of growing up on a farm," said Amanda. "I always felt fortunate to have both of my parents around all of the time."

Both Ralph and Michele come from large families. Ralph has eleven brothers and sisters. All but one of them live on dairy farms. Michele has seven brothers and sisters with one living on a farm. Amanda's cousin Wendy Gilkinson was Warren County Dairy Princess in 1997.

"We always try to get together with both families over the holidays," said Amanda. "We can all fit in one house, but not in one room."

Amanda's dream came true last September when she was crowned Pennsylvania Alternate Dairy Princess. "I never expected to be crowned a state alternate," said Amanda. "My goal was just to be in the top seven finalists."

Amanda has had lots of coaching in being state royalty. While she is the first state alternate from Erie County, two out of the last four Pennsylvania Dairy Princesses — Rhonda Keiklak and Nicole Meabon — have come from Erie.

"Rhonda was at my house the night before I left for the state pageant, making me do my skit, going through my clothes, and helping me get ready," said Amanda. "Nicki and I keep in touch through email and compare notes on princess activities."

Although she was nervous about being in the top seven, Amanda was most nervous about giving her speech during the pageant. She was one of two winners in the speech category and had to give her speech in front of the coronation audience. Her speech was about growing up on a dairy farm.

Amanda has enjoyed meeting all of the people she has met through being both Erie County and Pennsylvania Alternate Dairy Princess. "Everyone has something different that's interesting about them."

On the county level, Amanda has already fulfilled most of the requirements for the second level incentive that is awarded to princesses at the end of the year. She has done 37 school

promotions, along with many school promotions, newspaper articles, and special events. She has one dairy maid in her county who helps with the promotions.

On the state level, she has attended many banquets, spent countless hours at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, and spoke to several farm groups on behalf of the dairy princess program. Last weekend she helped at the Book and the Cook Fair in Philadelphia.

Amanda enjoys fulfilling the school promotions and non-farm presentation requirements of her reign the most.

"When you go and talk to people who aren't from farms or to young children, you really walk out of there feeling like you've taught them something that they didn't know before," said Amanda.

According to Amanda, the biggest challenge of being Pennsylvania Alternate Dairy Princess is balancing her dairy princess activities with school and extracurricular activities. She has missed 30 days of school so far but feels fortunate because her teachers are very supportive of her reign.

Amanda is a senior at Seneca High School in Wattsburg. She is the student council president and the District I student council president. She belongs to the National Honor Society, plays volleyball, and runs track. She also serves as the contact person for the Pennsylvania Free Enterprise, a weeklong session teaching sophomores and juniors about running their own business.

Outside of school, Amanda is a very active eleventh-year member in her local 4-H dairy club. She has attended almost every 4-H activity imaginable, including the 1999 National 4-H Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Amanda was one of 13 delegates selected to attend the national conference. People from all over attended the conference, including delegates from

Hawaii, Japan, and Alaska.

"We spent the week after Thanksgiving at the conference, and we had a blast," said Amanda. "I got to be on CNN's Talk Back Live show and saw the Olympic stadium in Atlanta."

Amanda has been the president of her 4-H dairy club, the Dairy Dippers, for the last five years. But this year she stepped down to serve as vice president. She is also on the teen council and participated in dairy bowl for Warren County in 1999.

Owning four 4-H animals, Amanda shows at local fairs, the 4-H round-up, and district 4-H shows. She doesn't attend the larger shows in the state, but she is usually pleased with how her dairy animals place locally.

Amanda is very active in the Pennsylvania Council of Cooperatives (PCC). In 1997 she started out in PCC by attending the local meeting, then went to Shippensburg for the state conference, and was chosen as a state finalist to attend the 1998 national conference held in California.

In 1999 Amanda was one of six teens asked to come back to the state conference as scholar staff. "I helped plan the week's activities and served as co-chair and an instructor for the week-long event," said Amanda.

Amanda is also a member of the St. Methias Catholic Church in New York. Next year, she plans to attend the Pennsylvania State University, majoring in agriculture economics.

While balancing her other activities with her dairy princess responsibilities is challenging, Amanda wouldn't give it up for anything. "Being a dairy princess is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

She attributes her dairy princess reign to helping her become more outgoing. "I am not afraid to try something new," said Amanda. "I also learned how to get along with people better."

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Amanda and her dad Ralph traveled down to State College last week for the Pennsylvania DHIA annual banquet. Ralph serves as a member of the Pennsylvania DHIA Board of Directors, while Amanda represented state dairy royalty at the banquet.



Amanda has four 4-H projects that she shows at local fairs and 4-H shows. Here she is with her Holstein cow, Erin.



Amanda lives her family on a 200-acre farm in Wattsburg, where they have 75 dairy animals. Her parents Ralph and Michele knew that a farm was the best place to raise their children.



Amanda's family is very supportive of her dairy princess activities. From left are her brother Stephen, mom Michele, father Ralph, and Amanda.