

On The Farm With Honey Queen Renee Blatt

(Continued from Page B2)

field was in full bloom, and bee traffic was heavy as the bees flew back and forth.

Renee enjoys experimenting cooking with honey. She even won some prizes among veteran cooks when she entered the contest sponsored by the Pa. State Beekeepers Association. She received first place for Honey Kissed Peanut Butter Cookies, which she said taste better than those made with sugar, and a third place for Honey Apple Nut Bread.

Not all of her promotional work is verbal. Renee helped members of the beekeepers association set up the ice cream booth at the state farm show, and made a bee hive stencil to stencil the wall behind the booth.

"I guess you could say I'm artistic and can turn out some pretty good work if I set my mind to it," Renee said.

She believes she picked up her do-it-yourself attitude from her dad, who incorporates ideas he sees into his farming operation.

The Blatts farm 150 acres of Renee's grandfather's farm and rent an additional 130 acres.

Renee's family are independent hog farmers, who sell 6,200 hogs a year, and milk about 45 cows.

Blatt is fiercely proud of the independent sow to farrow operation. "As long as we raise hogs according to industry standards, there is no problem getting rid of them," he said of not having the security of a contract. The 45-pound hogs are sold to an independent buyer who sells them to Leighty's when finished.

During last year's depressing market hog prices, the family made a decision to go into the dairy business. The red-painted dairy barn was empty so the family purchased 45 Holsteins. The tie stall stanchion barn isn't as up-to-date as the family would like, but find it works out

well for their purposes.

He said, "Cows are a lot of work, but they help with the cash flow."

While dairy farmers lament milk's low prices, Blatt said they have never had its as bad as hog farmers. He quoted a report from Farm Bureau that determined if other commodity prices had fallen to the level that hog prices had, relative to 10-year average prices, you'd see milk at \$2.20 a hundred pounds.

Milk is shipped to the Mt. Joy Coop.

Renee raises her own nine-acre plot of corn. She has entered corn in Five Acre Corn Club. At both regional and state competitions, she received a 1999 FFA Proficiency Award for corn and grain production.

The family mixes its own feed for cows and pigs.

Blatt said that he plans to remain independent but encourages his kids to go to school to learn something other than farming.

"They can always come back if they want to," he said.

Renee has six months until graduation from Central Pennsylvania College, where she will receive an associates degree in entrepreneurial and small business and marketing.

Renee got a head start in entrepreneurial business when she was in high school. She processed a sow and packaged sausage patties in five pound boxes of 20 patties. She marketed the sausage to family and friends.

The venture helped her save a lot of money for college, but the problem was delivering the sausages. "Everyone wanted to talk. I like to talk too," but if you counted my time for delivering, I didn't make a lot of profit," she said.

At college, Renee is vice president of human resources for the student store, the Campus Connection, is a SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise) certified

scholar, and recognized by the national dean's list.

A graduate of Northern Lebanon High School, Renee was active in FFA, field hockey, cross country, winter track, track, marching band, varsity club, SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving), Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Who's Who Among American High School Students, and she set a school record for the 26-mile Philadelphia Marathon.

The marathon demonstrates Renee's perseverance and determination. She said that her parents, teachers, and friends were skeptical that she would finish. They warned her that 26 miles is a long run.

They were right about it being a race of endurance. It took four hours and 23 minutes and seemed like an eternity, but Renee did it.

Renee is also an outstanding example of overcoming a weight problem. She considered herself fat, and frankly shares an embarrassing episode that resulted in her determination to shed 35 pounds between her eighth and ninth grades. She said, one day when she stood up, her school desk stuck to her hips. She shed the pounds by improving her diet and through exercise. That's when she developed her love for running.

"I'm always running back and forth between the house and barn," she said of the distance that measures about a half mile.

"I like to stay in shape because I feel healthy," she said.

Renee would like to become certified to teach aerobics and help overweight people attain weight and fitness goals.

Renee also raised beef cattle for market and would like to have a cow and calf operation someday, but doesn't have time now. Although she loves bees and dairy farming, she said that she wouldn't miss hogs, although she shows them at the Lebanon Fair and Farm Show.

On the farm, Renee and mom take care of the dairy end, her brothers the hogs, and her dad takes care of the other farm responsibilities. Renee also helps with the field work.



Gov. Thomas Ridge accepts a commodity basket filled with honey products from Pa. Honey Queen Renee Blatt and Sec. of Ag Samuel Hayes Jr.



Do you know what Pooh bears like best?" asks the Honey Queen as she hands out a "I love honey" sticker to a boy wearing a Winnie the Pooh shirt.

She definitely wants a career in agriculture. As part of her schooling she is required to fill an internship, which she hopes leads to a full-time position.

"She's a rare bird," her dad said of daughter. "She does a lot of things people don't expect a girl to do."

If interested in booking the Honey Queen for an event, contact Linda Hackenburg, queen committee chairperson, at (570) 568-2337.

Queen candidates are needed for the upcoming state competition scheduled for November.

"Being honey queen is such a great opportunity, I encourage

all girls interested to apply. I have learned so much about bees and beekeeping, and there are lots of opportunities within the industry," Renee said.

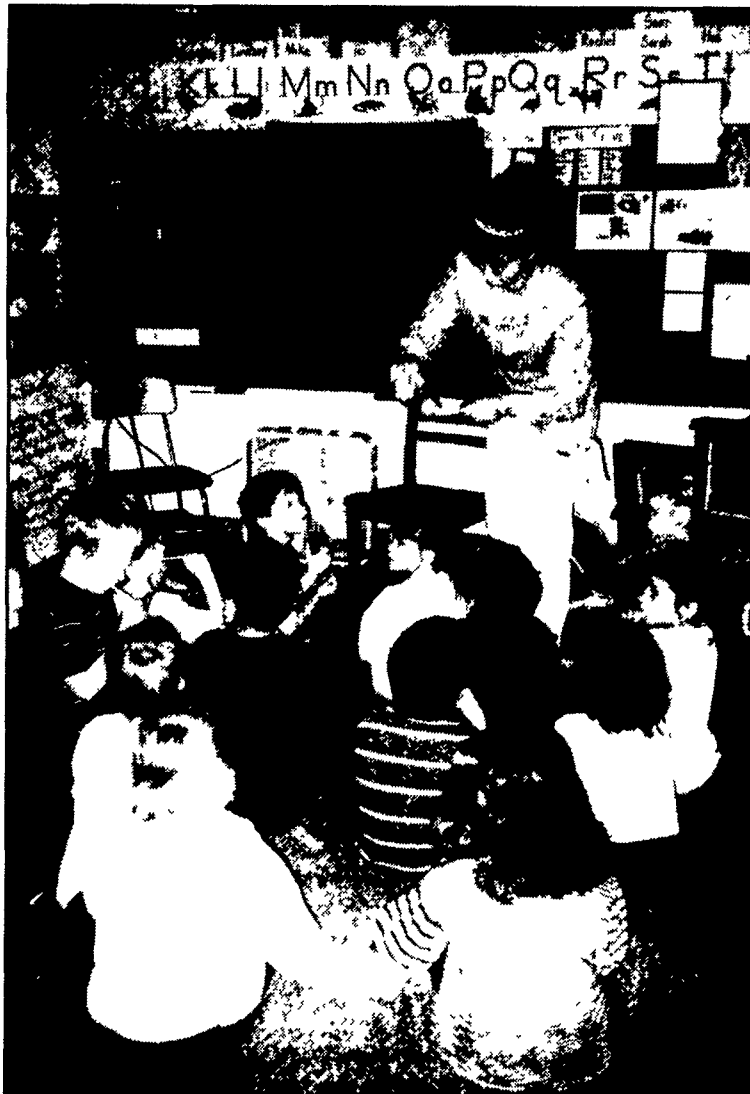
Here is an quick, refreshing drink that Renee enjoys.

HONEY SHAKE IT UP

- 1½ cups milk
- 1½ cups strawberries, sliced
- 1 cup vanilla yogurt
- ¼ cup honey
- 5 ice cubes

Combine all ingredients except ice cubes in blender, and blend until thick and creamy. Add ice cubes one at a time and blend until smooth.

Makes four 1-cup servings.



During a school promotions, Renee explains the importance of bees and how honey is extracted for use.



Renee enjoys reading letters from students who write to tell her how they are no longer scared of bees and how her demonstrations are their favorite ones from the many organizations that visit the school.