

# Pennsylvania Ayrshire Princess Deals With The Worst, Best

**LOU ANN GOOD**  
Food And Family  
Features Editor

**ENTRIKEN** (Huntingdon Co.) — One of the best and worst days in Jodi Keith's life happened April 27. That was the day that her favorite cow died from a perforated rectum — and the day she was crowned Pennsylvania Ayrshire Princess.

The usually cheery 16-year-old was distraught from the death of her cow, but she pushed aside her emotions as she rushed from the family's farm in Entriken to participate in the princess contest at the State Ayrshire Convention, New Enterprise.

Flustered from the death of her favorite cow, Jodi believed her interview with the judges "went badly."

Jodi told her parents John and Cindy and siblings Stacie, 13, and Andy, 14, to forget about the possibility of her being selected as princess.

But Jodi dutifully completed the competition by answering an impromptu question on stage during the convention luncheon. Afterward, Jodi was shocked to hear her name called as the new Pennsylvania Ayrshire Princess.

The designation could not be more fitting. Jodi is a full-fledged Ayrshire advocate and is deeply involved in her family's dairy operation.

She daily feeds the calves while her dad and brother take care of milking parlor duties.

The Keith family have a 50-head herd of Holsteins. Ayrshires were not introduced to the herd until Jodi joined 4-H. In the beginning, Jodi's parents thought it appropriate that she show beef calves since the family's Holstein dairy herd had an abundance of bull calves. But that required selling the dairy projects after the shows. Although the money was designated to Jodi's college fund, the plan had a downside.

"After each show, we had to deal with buckets of tears," Jodi's mom said. "Because Jodi had become so attached to her projects, she couldn't bear parting with them."

The parents reevaluated their plan and decided it would be better for Jodi to raise animals that



Perfecting their milk moustaches are Pennsylvania Ayrshire Princess Jodi Keith, center, her sister Stacie, 13, and Taylor Mitchell, 8, who Jodi babysits during the summer months.



The Keith family includes parents John and Cindy, Jodi, 16; Stacie, 13; and Andy, 14.

could be added to the herd to build equity instead of sold. Both parents had grown up showing

animals. They knew the smaller-sized Ayrshires would be easier to handle than Holsteins. So they

purchased an Ayrshire calf for Jodi.

Since then, more Ayrshires

have been added for projects for Jodi's younger siblings Stacie and Andy. In addition, heifers have been bred and the herd size increased.

"But I seemed to have lots of bad luck with mine," Jodi said. In addition to bull calves, her Ayrshires have met some untimely fates.

Showing them also started off badly. The first year in 4-H competition, "Pixie" refused to walk, resulting in a bottom of the class placing. But the next year, Pixie took reserve junior champion at the Huntingdon Fair, 4-H Fair, and open show.

When the bovines become old enough to milk, the Keiths no longer take them to competition.

"Dad doesn't believe in taking milking animals to the fair," Jodi said of the potential for problems.

As experiencing both the bottom and top placings at fairs, Jodi is philosophical. She said, "Even if you're at the bottom, you still have the opportunity to work and train an animal. That accomplishment helps build self-esteem."

The Keiths' farm has been passed down through the generations from the Civil War. It is thought to be the first farm that was settled in the Huntingdon Valley. Family stories related that during the Civil War, four women and their children moved into the farm house while their husbands went off to war.

The log home has been recently remodeled, but the family lore continues.

"All I ever wanted to do was farm," Keith said of growing up on the farm with the rich heritage. His mother, a school teacher, pushed him to go to college in case farming didn't work out.

At Penn State, Keith studied ag economics and rural sociology because the school hadn't established a dairy science department at that time.

Following graduation in 1977, Keith returned to the family farm. Within the year, he increased his father's herd from 22 head to about 50. In 1985, he began renting additional ground totally 400 acres. He put up an

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Getting an early start on the intricacies of cherry picking is 2-year-old Tristan, held by his grandfather Richard Haas, who purchased Cherry Hill Orchards in 1970. Haas recently transferred ownership to his son Tom.



## Cherry Picking Season Opens

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**LANCASTER** (Lancaster Co.) — Cherry picking season in Lancaster County opened June 12 and is expected to run for two to three weeks.

Plump, perfect cherries hung in abundant clumps at Cherry Hill Orchards, Long Lane on Marticville Road, where a pick-your-own cherry operation attracts hundreds of families.

It's one of the best seasons ever, according to Richard Haas, whose family has operated the orchard since 1970. An early spring frost thinned out the blossoms, resulting in larger and better flavored fruit.

Cherry Hill has more than 25 varieties of sweet cherries on 60 acres and 5 acres of sour cherries. A Pennsylvania survey showed that Cherry Hill produces 20 percent of all sweet cherries in the state and is also listed as the state's largest sweet cherry orchard.

Pick-it-yourselfers are free to pick wherever they prefer in the acres of orchards.

Haas said when he took over the operation, customers were assigned to one tree and were expected to thoroughly pick it.

"I got an ulcer trying to enforce that rule," Haas said.

So he relaxed the rules and things have turned out much better for everyone. The customer

chooses what he or she thinks is best. The cherries left behind ripen into even bigger and sweeter fruit because the trees are less stressed.

Over the years, orchard growing has changed. Trees are smaller, making them easier to pick. Although many dwarf varieties are planted, the older, mature trees, mostly planted in 1977, are topped to keep them from growing too tall.

Recently, 1,400 special ladders replaced the tall, unwieldy wooden ones.

New stock planted is one-year-old trees about the diameter of Haas's smallest finger. The trees

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