

Nonfarm Teen Pursues Ag Interests By Choice

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Food And Family
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ANNVILLE (Lebanon Co.) — Lebanon County Dairy Princess Laura Blanch doesn't live on the farm, but that doesn't keep her from being a farm girl. She raises a calf in her back yard and keeps five heifers at her cousin's farm.

"I grew up watching my cousins work with cows on the farm and at shows," Laura said of her fascination with bovine animals.

When she was 10 years old, Laura convinced her parents to let her raise a 4-H calf. That calf is grown now, but each year Laura gets another 4-H calf that she raises in a hutch in the fami-

ly's backyard in rural Anville. Laura has five heifers that she raises at her cousin's farm.

"I have mostly Brown Swiss, which I love. They are so unique and interesting."

Laura also helps with unloading hay and straw on the farm and with occasional feeding and milking.

"I especially enjoy feeding the cows. My cousins have about 60 head, mostly Holsteins," Laura said.

"It's nice to be able to work on the farm without being tied down to it everyday," she said.

Laura's first introduction to dairy promotion happened when she was in eighth grade. She

knew the county dairy princess who asked her to assume the dairy maid role. As a dairy maid, Laura helped with promotions by handing out recipes, cheese, and milk punch samples.

"I enjoyed that experience, so when they ask me to run for dairy princess, I did," she said.

As a 17-year-old senior, Laura contemplated how she could come up with the required speech to convince people to consume more dairy products. In a conversation with her mom, they discussed the fact that many people have misconceptions about the dairy industry. That subject became the basis for Laura's speech. She selected eight common misconceptions and presented the truth.

"It was sort of a last-minute panic," Laura said of polishing the speech to give before a pageant audience and judges.

The speech was well accepted. When she presented the speech at the county level, it helped catapulted her into the position of county princess, which enabled her to advance to state competition. Last September at the state pageant, Laura's speech was one of two selected from all competing county princesses as the most outstanding.

Some of Laura's family members also have ties to the dairy industry. Her dad, Eric, is a feed salesman, and her brother Chris, 15, raises Jersey calves and is a member of the Lebanon County dairy bowl team. Her mom Connie enjoys buying and decorating with farm-related antiques.

Laura was a former member of the 4-H dairy bowl team, but is busy with dairy promotion. Most of the promotions are at the county level, but her favorite was helping at Lancaster County's ice cream fest last July. She escorted the Turkey Hill mascot, handed out cheese sticks to the crowd, and answered curious questions from the nonfarming public.

She said, "Again and again I am asked three questions: 'How old do cows get? Does it hurt cows when cows are milked, and how much does a cow weigh?'"

According to Laura, the oldest cow reached the age of 25 years, but most are much younger. It doesn't hurt the cow when she is milked, and the average cow weighs 1,400 pounds.

Another favorite promotion was a barn party at Terry Shuey's Lebanon County farm. Students from several local schools and a school from New Jersey attended the event. Laura answered questions about cows and help churn homemade ice cream a big hit with the visitors.

Laura also enjoyed visiting the commissioners at the county courthouse, where she handed out cheeseball samples and milk punch to all courthouse visitors.



This is the sixth calf Lebanon County Dairy Princess Laura Blanch has raised in her backyard as a 4-H project.

A senior at Anville-Cleona High School, Laura studies physics, calculus, English, writing lab, and speech.

"I'm much more into academics than athletics," she said.

Her high school peers view her status of dairy princess positively. They were excited that she received the state speech award and like to see her at promotions.

"I also participate in every music group the school has," she said. An accomplished pianist, Laura continues lessons she began in second grade.

Although she has the ability to pursue a music career, Laura said that she plans to study history at either Ursinus or Gettysburg College. After graduation, her goal is to enter the Peace Corps and teach in Mongolia, which is north of China, for two years.

She considers her experience as dairy princess as contributing toward that goal. "The dairy princess position has built confidence in me as a public speaker, and will help me with teaching. Also, I've worked with different age groups, which will help me in teaching, and I learned to be knowledgeable in the dairy industry," Laura said.

The threat to world peace and of moving to a remote area near northern China doesn't particularly concern Laura. She said, "I have a lot of faith in God. I can sit here and worry — it doesn't change the situation."

She considers she might as well offer her services in a constructive matter, and is impressed with Peace Corps' contribution to world peace.

Laura helps teach a preschool Sunday school class at her church.

She describes herself as hard working and said that she tends to take on more than she can handle sometimes.

"But I think once you commit yourself to an activity, you should finish what you start and not quit," she said.

Here is Laura's favorite dairy recipe, which her Uncle Bill devised. It is very rich, so the Blauchs only serve it for holiday dinners or special occasions.

UNCLE BILL'S MUSHROOMS WITH SOUR CREAM

- 2 cups chopped onions
- ½ pound butter, divided
- 2 pounds fresh mushrooms, washed, quartered
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 8 ounces sour cream
- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese

Saute onions in ¼ cup butter in large skillet until soft. Add mushrooms and saute 5 minutes longer. Sprinkle flour, salt and pepper over mushrooms and stir until well blended. Add heavy cream and sour cream. Cook on low until mixture bubbles. Pour into 8-cup shallow casserole dish, sprinkle with cheddar cheese. Drizzle with ¼ cup melted butter. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until cheese melts and sauce is set. Serves 6-8.



Lebanon County Dairy Princess Laura Blanch keeps a record of promotional duties. She also won the outstanding speech award at the state pageant competition.



Although she is an accomplished pianist and musician, Laura chooses to pursue history studies at college.

