

Marianne Karalunas is a *very* busy woman

She is the newest Luzerne County farm director, and a whole lot more

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self-sustaining in that era. "You didn't go hungry back then, but you didn't have shoes."

At one time, her uncle ran a dairy farm, which he closed down for many years before starting in again with beef cattle. In 1976, he bought six registered Hereford cows, then a registered bull. She and her sister took over the Herefords after her uncle died. "We're still breeding that same bloodline he started with about 25 years ago," she adds.

Karalunas and her sister agreed their herd would be self-supporting or they would get out of the business. They have been very successful thus far, taking advantage of a state and federal drought aid loan only once, a few years back. They try not to use money from their outside jobs to supplement the farm business. Many farmers do this type of part-time farming today as "the only time anybody in farming makes any money is when they quit," Karalunas explains. "Everything that comes in, goes out — comes in, goes out."

While many urbanites live from paycheck to paycheck, it is a bit different for farmers making it from crop to crop. There is no 401K retirement plan, no health insurance.

Karalunas tells the story of a friend with a dairy farm in Susquehanna County who broke her foot and set it herself with the help of her husband, because there was no money to spend on doctor bills.

When a farmer goes to apply for medical assistance, they have to list their assets and they are asset rich. "You're going to list an \$18,000 tractor, which

you need for your livelihood. You can't sell it. It's a Catch-22 there." Her friends, unfortunately, had to get out of the dairy business. "They just couldn't do it anymore," she says. "But they contacted me recently about buying some beef cattle."

Oh, and Karalunas has a "real" job too. At 5 a.m., you will find her cooking eggs at a fast food restaurant in Shavertown. She comes home from her job at about 1 p.m., takes 20 minutes on the couch, then goes out to feed the cattle and the horses and take care of the barn work. It is about an hour job for her and her sister, who take on the majority of the daily feeding and care of the cattle. "It's a responsibility — every day," she says. "You can't say, 'Oh well.' You can't lie in bed until 1:30 either." Then there is supper and homework, scout meetings or birthday parties to taxi the son to.

Karalunas wonders, "What do other people do with their days?"

Since November, she has added one more activity to her hectic schedule. "When John Manzone asked me if I'd like to be on the board of directors for the Conservation District, I said sure," Karalunas explains why. "It's something I feel passionate about. And there comes a time in life that you have everything you want and you look to where you can give something back."



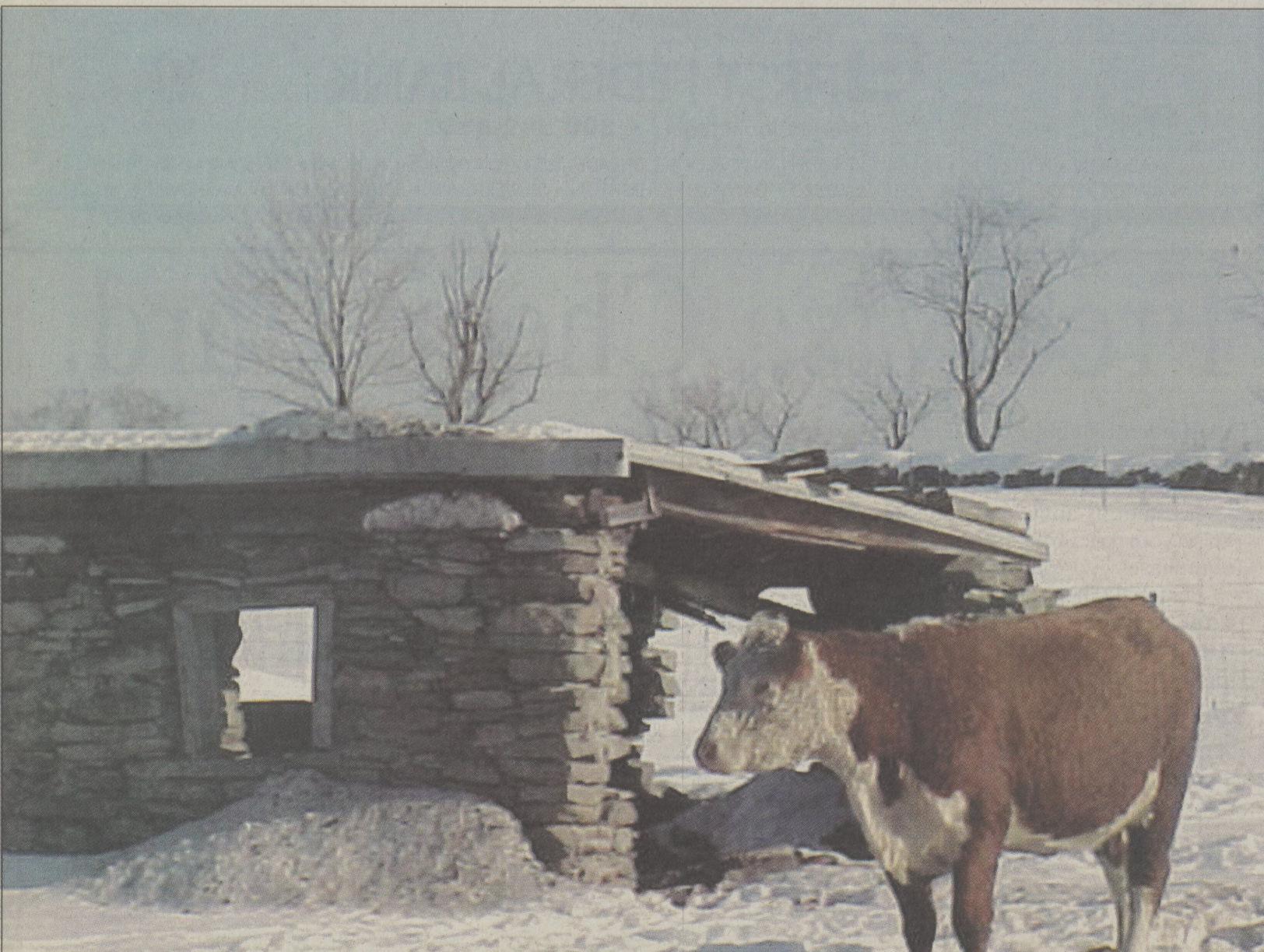
Karalunas and her son, Cody, take a breather in the farm equipment building.



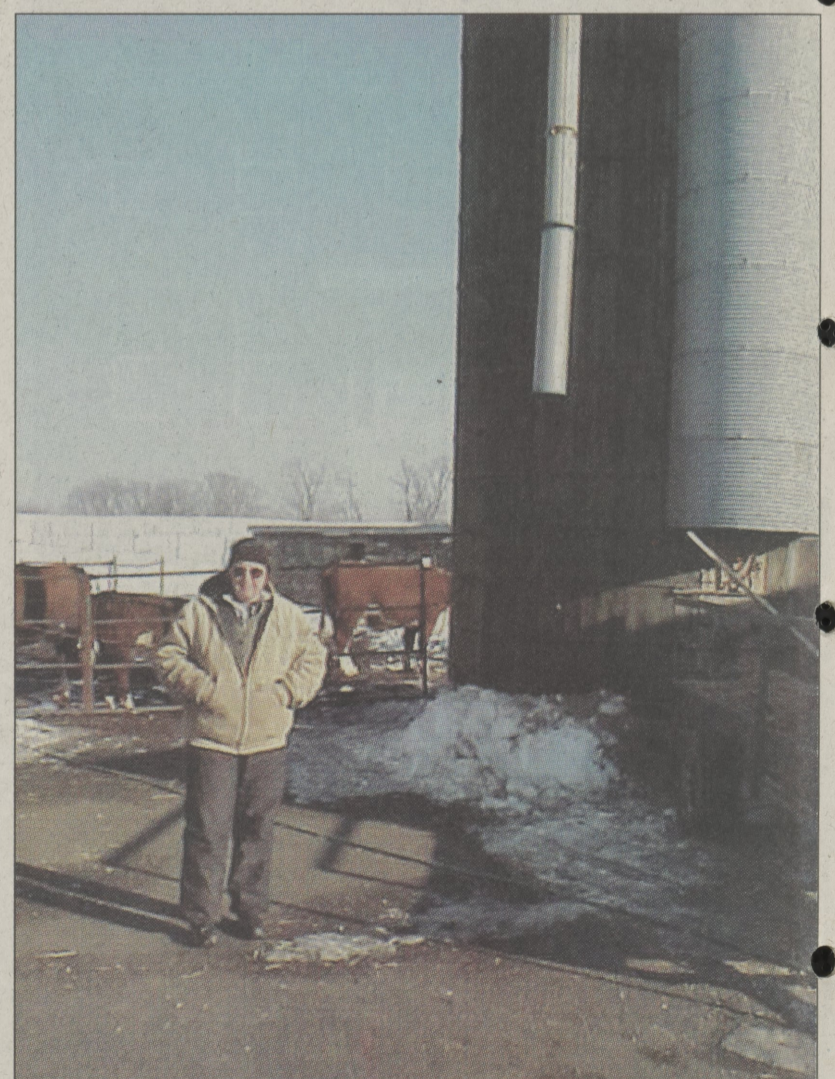
The family farm's barns and silo as seen from the Karalunas' home.



13-year-old Cody Karalunas perches on one of the tractors.



One of Karalunas's pregnant heifers next to an old "shanty" that housed pigs long ago.



Wearing three layers of clothing as protection from the cold, Marianne Karalunas stands near the silo holding winter feed for the cattle.

POST PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON