"I'm a Farmer's Wife"

Helen R. McLaughlin
Iowa State College

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker
Part of the Home Economics Commons

Recommended Citation
McLaughlin, Helen R. (1946) "I'm a Farmer's Wife," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 26 : No. 8 , Article 2.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol26/iss8/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Homemaker by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
"I'm a Farmer's Wife"

Helen R. McLaughlin

Perhaps the McLaughlins are in one of your classes. They are taking courses here this quarter to help with experimental farming.

I HAD always wanted to marry a farmer. There is little question about combining a marriage and career on the farm. The career is right here, all cut out and ready to be sewed together in any pattern you wish to follow. And for extra variety and zest, I'll take experimental farming.

I have lived for 2 years on the Crystal Lake Experiment Farm, owned by the Iowa State College Alumni Association and operated by the Experiment Station. Located 95 miles north of Ames, between Britt and Crystal Lake, its purpose is to learn more about successful operation of peat land farms.

Most of the work is done with vegetable crops because vegetables are usually more profitable than corn on peat. There are 40 acres in the farm, about half of it peat. Forty acres of the peat are devoted to experimental plots, and the rest of the farm is used for further testing of the plot findings and development of a balanced farm program.

This experiment farm has been operated by the college for only 4 years, so the physical plant is just taking form. I put some of my own ideas into effect in remodeling our house. Before our arrival the house had been modernized, and two rooms had been added at the rear. The rear entrance leads into one of these extra rooms which we have made our office.

We welcome overshoes

The basic principle of usefulness for the office is the rule "overshoes allowed." The gasoline tank truck driver brings an invoice to be signed, a tractor driver needs the manual to attach a piece of equipment, my husband dashes in to check on the seeding plans, all these busy people are encouraged to come into the office without removing their overshoes. This policy is good for morale—and peat is easy to sweep out.

The farm becomes a quiet place in winter, but during the summer with reinforcements from Ames it is a busy colony. There are three cottages for use by staff members who move up to directly supervise the work on the experimental plots of their departments. There is also a "staff house" for use by those whose work requires only occasional trips to the farm. It is a converted CCC building and provides sufficient space for the larger groups who come for field days—or for pheasant hunting in the fall.

Looking from the office windows down across the peat, the experimental area presents a patchwork of greens and tans on black. "The peat is dark when wet, and all other colors contrast sharply. In spring we may see a jackrabbit, still in his white winter coat, dashing about trying to be inconspicuous on a 40 acre expanse of bare, intensely black soil. The peat bog never looks so big as then."

The drainage pump is an important factor in the farm operation. Almost all peat, because it was formed in old lake beds, is subject to flooding. After a 4 inch rain the pump must run day and night, its steady hum blending with the sounds of the frogs in the drainage ditches.

I drive a truck, too

I have all the usual duties of the farmer's wife, plus a few that belong to experimental farming. I occasionally drive the pick-up truck or a tractor for some field work, and I like to be on hand when the cattle are to be moved. Bookkeeping is an important part of the business of farming at any time, but for a public institution it becomes a regular part-time job.

There is a steady stream of callers at my back door. Usually they want to know where my husband is, but only radar could keep track of a farm manager on a busy day. If he is away they may want to see how much of the information I can supply. I must keep posted on where the trucker is to spread the lime this afternoon, which hay the baler is to do first, where the Mexicans are to start weeding potatoes, how much we are charging for potatoes. An information sign at the door would cover one of my jobs.

Sometimes advice as well as information is wanted. I described to one gentleman the kinds of potatoes for sale at the storage. The matter of keeping quality seemed important to him, but he was still undecided. For a few seconds he stood wishing his wife were along, and then asked, "Well, what kind do you like best to cook?" I gave him my considered advice, and he took 10 bags.

"Try these onions"

Occasionally the request is from a staff member. "Please cook these potatoes and let me know which kind you like better." Or, "These onions are a new sweet kind for bunching. Try them and see if you like them." Of course these are only informal, preliminary tests; final tests will be made in the laboratory.

The Department of Horticulture is carrying on work in the improvement of varieties and cultural methods, with special emphasis on potatoes, onions and peas. In 1945, two new varieties of potatoes which had been developed for the most part at the Crystal Lake Farm were named. Visitors are sometimes impressed when we show them an acre of potatoes in which no two plants have the same parents.