

# Lancaster Farming

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**NEW RINGGOLD (Schuylkill Co.)** — The sun casts some long shadows nowadays, and the area simply has seen too much sun and not nearly enough rain. On Tuesday, the state Department of Environmental Protection issued a drought warning for Lancaster and other counties, including York, Lebanon, Dauphin, Cumberland, Chester, Perry, and York. Ten other southeast counties, the Lehigh Valley, and the northeast have been placed on a drought watch, bringing to 55 the total number of counties on the state's drought watch list.

Despite all that, work continues, especially with the upcoming holidays.

According to the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service, for week ending Nov. 4, soil moisture was rated 31 percent very short, 40 percent short, 26 percent adequate, and only 3 percent surplus. Harvested corn, planted winter wheat, emerged winter wheat, harvested soybeans, fourth cutting of alfalfa, and harvested apples are ahead of the five-year average. Most fruit and vegetable harvests were just about completed for the year.

The photographer captured this view of Pinecrest Tree Farms from Rt. 895 and Rausch's Road in Schuylkill County earlier this week.

Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

## Schwartz, Myers Family Century Farm Honored At Ag Banquet

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
**WILLOW STREET (Lancaster Co.)** — The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce celebrated the rich and ongoing his-

tory of local agriculture during its 25th Ag Industry Banquet here Monday evening.

Ag Services Coordinator Brent Landis announced continued success of the Chamber's

Agriculture Services Program, thanking the 22-member ag committee for its leadership.

"One of the Ag Program's primary goals is to educate the non-farm community on the vital role Lancaster County agriculture plays in our nation," Landis told the 870 people in attendance.

The ag committee received the annual Pennsylvania Farm-City Award in January for "outstanding efforts in educating the

nonfarm community about agriculture," Landis said.

Among Lancaster's Ag Pro-

gram initiatives Landis discussed was a new version of the

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## Lancaster Farming Announces 2002 Ag Directory

**EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.)** — An updated, expanded edition of Lancaster Farming's Ag Directory will be available December 29 for our readers.

Last year, the 160-page directory included names, phone numbers, addresses, and Web-sites of agriculture businesses, (Turn to Page A43)



### Family Farm Transitional Seminar

Tuesday, November 13, 2001  
Farm and Home Center Lancaster, PA



Lancaster Farming's first Family Farm Transitional Seminar is scheduled this Tuesday, Nov. 13, at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster, with preregistration required. Check out this issue's booklet featuring the schedule, the speakers, sponsors, and some words from the editor. Cover photo by Andy Andrews, editor



Debra and Arlin Benner, center, consider employees of Yippee Farms as family. With them are full-time employees Chuck Tadych, Mark Howard, Bryan Allman, Dave Unruh, Steve Diener, Mike Hall, Ron Shirk, Enrique Lopez, Venancia Martinea, and Juan Mendoza. Yippee Farms milks about 595 cows, raises replacements, and farms 700 acres in Mount Joy. Read more about how Debra Benner, a former actress, became involved with dairying and dairy promotion on page B3. Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

Scanned by CamScanner

# New York Actress Becomes Lancaster County Dairy Farmer

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

**MOUNT JOY (Lancaster Co.)**

— As a former New York actress, Debra Benner faced numerous adjustments and culture shock after marrying Lancaster County dairy farmer Arlin Benner. One of the biggest shocks was noticing the amount of money deducted from each milk check for something called the "dairy checkoff."

She made lots of phone calls to find out exactly how the money was being spent and why.

As a former actress and employee of the largest advertising firm in Texas, Debra was well acquainted with the need for advertising and the high cost attached to it. But what floored Debra were some of the ads appearing on television and in magazines.

"I was sitting in a chair at my hairdresser flipping through People magazine. I saw this photo of a celebrity with a milk moustache. The provocative pose would make any dairy farmer blush. I was appalled by the ad and I come from New York City," Debra said.

Why should dairy farmers be paying for an ad for a wholesome product that looks anything but wholesome? In addition, anyone who knows that actress, knows that she is anorexic. Debra said, "She doesn't even drink milk."

Although Debra recognizes the need for advertising to be on the cutting edge and that high-profile actresses grab viewers attention, she also knows that messages can be parlayed just as effectively without paying lots of money to use celebrities demanding top dollar.

Debra made more phone calls. "I know how hard we (farmers) are working for our dollar," she said.

"If we use celebrities, we should use wholesome ads—not those that make dairy farmers blush."

Phone calls such as these were placed often by Debra, who has firm opinions about advertising and promotion. A few months

ago, Debra made another phone call after reading of the need for a person to be elected to a board that determines how milk advertising dollars are spent.

This time, she asked if she could nominate herself to the board. She faxed her application, business experience, resume, and a summary of what she and her husband Arlin did with their dairy operation.

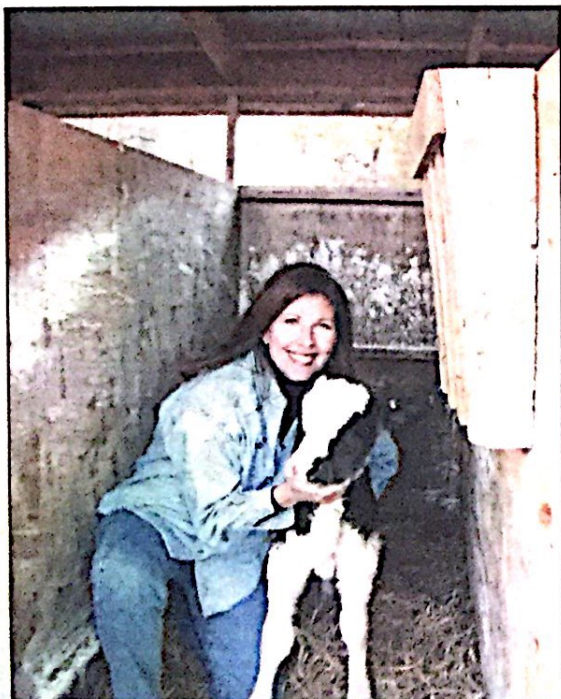
In October, Debra was notified that she had been elected to a three-year term — as one of 36 people to the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board monitored by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. The board met this week in Orlando, Fla., with affiliates from the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council Mid East and Dairy Management, Inc. This means she will work with the board that implements dairy promotion, education, and research programs nationwide. She will help determine how those checkoff dollars are being spent.



Debra and Arlin Benner, center, consider employees of Yippee Farms as family. With them are full-time employees Chuck Tadych, Mark Howard, Bryan Allman, Dave Unruh, Steve Diener, Mike Hall, Ron Shirk, Enrique Lopez, Venancia Martinea, and Juan Mendoza. Yippee Farms milk about 595 cows, raise replacements, and farm 700 acres.



Debra knows every calf by name and claims she can even distinguish their cries—quite an accomplishment for differentiating the 85 calves that often fill the pens.



Debra has drawn upon her chemistry and premed studies in caring for calves and assisting with veterinary work.

When she moved to New York City as business manager for an ad firm, her childhood dream to become an actress was revived. Soon Debra was busy doing television and print commercials and stage work. She read about the need for actors and actresses for the stage performance of Noah put on by Sight and Sound (now Millennium Theater).

She was excited to work as an actress for a Christian organization. But coming to Lancaster County was a bit of a shock and she didn't intend to stay long.

Through a chance meeting, Debra met her landlady's nephew, Arlin Benner. Within a short time, both were convinced that their marriage was ordained by God and they married within three months of meeting each other.

The couple had the preconceived idea that Arlin could take care of the dairy farm while she pursued her acting career. But life didn't turn out that smoothly.

Debra recalls that the day they returned to the farm after their marriage was the same day the biggest snowstorm of the century hit Lancaster. The electric had been turned off and Arlin needed her help in the barn. She wore her fashionable name-brand snowboots and suede jacket to go to the milking parlour.

"Arlin didn't tell me that I'd never be wearing them again in public," she recounts with a laugh.

Although Debra took over the farm bookwork immediately because she had accounting experience, her exposure to farming was severely limited and the lifestyle that she was to adopt was greatly altered.

For two years after their marriage, the couple maintained their separate careers, but the strain such diverse lifestyles placed on their marriage forced them to reevaluate. Debra bid her acting career farewell and started working on the farm.

Milking wasn't an undertaking she wanted to pursue, so she started out feeding calves. Get-

ting up and going to the barn early in the morning was an adjustment, but Debra fell in love with the furry creatures and soon turned them into pets. Her premed background has helped and she thrives on assisting the veterinarian in the barn.

When she first started, Arlin was milking 150 cows on the family farm that he had purchased from his parents. Three years ago, the couple purchased an additional farm and rent a third with a total of 700 acres. They have expanded to 595 milking cows, about 500 replacements, and 85 calves.

"The calves are my babies. When I'm mixing the feed, and hear one cry I know exactly which one is crying," she said.

The Benners have eight full-time employees and eight part-time. Three of their employees are Spanish-speaking. Debra's fluent Spanish (she had pursued Spanish studies as a student in Spain) is a plus in the workplace.

Passersby who notice the large farm sign that reads "Yippee Farm, Mal. 4.2," are often puzzled.

The couple eagerly explain that they wanted a trade name that gave God credit and portrayed their beliefs. The passage of scripture refers to "those who revere my (God's) name will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

To Debra, the most delightful aspect of farming is seeing how so many scriptures are tied into what happens in farming.

"The calves are stuck in their little hutches for eight weeks, and when they are released in the barn with all that room, they run, skip, and kick up their heels.

"We are so blessed to be farmers. I see the word of God come alive in ways I never experienced before."

The words bubble over as Debra recounts incidents such as tractor drilling, and digging up the dirt is like God plowing up the fallow ground of hearts. "It's so painful, because our hearts are

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# *New York Actress Becomes Lancaster County Dairy Farmer*

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often so hard. But God needs to break up that hardness so that he can plant the seed of the truth of his word in our hearts.”

The couple takes every other weekend off. Otherwise, Debra goes to the barn about 6:30 a.m. and estimates that she works a 10-hour day.

It's quite different from the wealthy lifestyle of her childhood, where maids did the manual work and she was given a Porsche for her 16th birthday.

“My husband is a visionary, he keeps seeing possibilities,” Debra said of the farm operation.

Arlin will accompany Debra to the national dairy meeting in Orlando. She was told that other spouses shop and see the sights during the sessions. “But Arlin would much rather attend the meetings than anything else,” Debra said.

Debra's career path is turning out to be a lot different than she had planned. She's excited that her appointment to the National Dairy Board may allow her to draw on her experiences with acting and advertising.

“Dairy farming is a vertical curve—never flat. We're constantly learning and growing,” Debra said.



**Recognize this person? As a New York actress, Debra often posed for television commercials and print advertisements in women's magazines. Two years after her marriage to Arlin Benner, a Lancaster County farmer, Debra gave up her acting career to work full-time on the farm. Recently she was appointed to the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, which determines how dairy checkoff dollars are spent.**