

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Agriculture

Gaye Pfeiffer

The gray late-winter morning with its damp, cold air doesn't seem to bother Gaye Pfeiffer of Mulhall. She is focused on the topic of agriculture, and she punctuates each of her statements with a smile.

For more than five decades, Oklahoma agriculture has come to cherish that gesture as the smile of a producer, friend and outstanding advocate.

Recently salesmen from a large national foodservice distribution company visited the northern Logan County farming and ranching operation Gaye and husband John have built since their marriage in 1981.

“We showed them around, took them out to the cows, everything. They are always amazed that there's so much science involved,” she said. “Before they get here, they think you just walk out in the pasture, you throw some hay out and you look at your cows. With a tour like this they see what you think about and what you care about. They see the connection and how the product is produced. Communication is so important.”

She smiled – and then moved to another critical aspect of agriculture.

It seldom fails that during wheat harvest in June, the temperature is hovering around 100 degrees and the Oklahoma wind is blowing that heat right in your face.

“When you are out there and you are binning wheat and it's hotter than heck and the wind is blowing so hard,” she said, “that is actually the time that I feel like ‘You know I am really feeding the world, this is going to be somebody's food down the road.’ On top of that you feel like all these other things you do, involvement in ag groups and organizations, help you make sure that we can continue to feed the world because people do not understand where their food comes from. I sincerely believe that feeding the world makes a difference and we really do that.”

She smiled.

This is the first in a series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of 14 industry professionals.

Gaye has and continues to champion agriculture through her actions and her words. Her ties to agriculture run not only through her childhood in Oktaha, and her family farm production with husband John and sons State Representative John Christopher Pfeiffer and Andy Pfeiffer, but also through involvement in numerous agricultural groups and organizations.

When they married in 1981, Gaye and John owned one quarter of land, leased another quarter and had about 30 registered cows. Today they run cows and farm about 2,300 acres, have 200 Registered Angus cows and 100 commercial cows. The Pfeiffers have a female production sale in the fall and a bull sale in the spring. Both are held with Blackjack Angus Farms in Seminole. They also lamb out 70 ewes and Andy has 24 sows to farrow.

Because she realizes the importance of conveying agriculture to those off the farm, Gaye has been quick to give of her time. Several years ago, through the Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers program she made her way through the state competition and represented Oklahoma in the American Farm Bureau Discussion Meet where she was a finalist. She was appointed to an Oklahoma Farm Bureau task force in 2000 to make long-range planning recommendations. Gaye has served as a 4-H volunteer at the local, county and state levels, including helping to grow the Mulhall-Orlando 4-H numbers to "never before seen sizes by encouraging speeches and community services," her son John said. She has also served as the Logan County Farm Bureau women's committee president and she has hosted tours for the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, OSU Extension, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and Certified Angus Beef.

The 1981 Oklahoma State University graduate's contributions to agriculture also include having served as the Editor of the Oklahoma Angus Challenger from 2006 to 2012 and as Secretary/Treasurer of the Oklahoma Angus Association from 2012 to the present.

Why the tireless service?

She smiled this time even before making a statement.

"Growing up, I was taught that you need to do something that makes yourself happy, but also makes a difference," she said. "Hopefully we have passed that on to our children. I want them to have a happy life, but I also want them to make a difference for good. It's not big, giant things,

it's an accumulation of a lot of little things that you're committed to and those things just build together."

In her childhood, Gaye learned this from her mother Mary Burgin: "Her favorite saying was, 'God gives you what you need, but He doesn't put it in the nest for you.' That means you have to go out and make it happen and my mom lived that. On the farm, you have living things depending on you. You can't say, 'It's too hard, it's late, I'm done.'"

Gaye has a passion for agriculture she loves to share. Take for example the little thank you card and photo a 10-year-old girl sent her from Spearman, Texas. Gaye had been out in the Texas Panhandle community at her nephew's stock show. The night before the show, she noticed the girl was having a hard time with her show pig. So, Gaye introduced herself.

"We get out in the ring and we practice, practice, practice," Gaye said. "She gets the pig shown the next day and wins a blue ribbon. That wasn't because of me, she did it."

The note the child wrote and sent to her new friend told another story.

"Thank you for all your help this year at the stock show," the child wrote. "Me and Donut couldn't have gotten where we did without your help."

The fact that it was a pig she helped the little girl with was significant. Throughout most of her life Gaye has been around primarily cattle and some sheep, but not pigs.

One April morning in the early 1990s, Gaye was taking 3-year-old Andy to the babysitter. They were traveling on State Highway 51 not far from the farm.

"It was a very foggy day and someone was passing on the wrong side and we crashed head on," Gaye said. "Andy didn't have a single broken bone, but the impact shook him so hard that he had a horrible brain injury. He was in a coma."

Today, he still faces challenges, including with his eyesight, but he has accomplished more than doctors originally thought he would.

Son John Pfeiffer tells more of that story.

"After my brother's accident, it left him unable to participate in showing the species of animals that we had always showed, namely cattle and sheep, but he could show pigs," he said. "Andy started showing pigs and developed a true love for not only showing them but raising them. My mother now devotes much of her time to raising and promoting swine."

Having read that statement, Gaye smiled.

"When something like that happens, the accident, you find out how good people are, like your church and your school," Gaye said. "People brought food out here every day for six weeks, and

we would sit with Andy during the day and someone else would sit with him at night. People stepped up to help. We love stepping up to help others.”

The Pfeiffers do love helping others and they love helping agriculture. Most of all, they love doing this together.

“Being able to work every day, and sometimes nights, alongside your husband and sons is what makes farming so fulfilling to me,” Gaye said. “John and I both feel that we were meant to be caretakers of the land and livestock. The fact that we could work together to build an operation that is worthy of being passed on to the next generation has made a very satisfying life for us. Our sons started out feeding bottle calves when they were 6 years old and selling eggs at school. They know the work and responsibilities that come with a farm and I think it is a compliment that they have a strong interest in agriculture and a desire to be fifth generation agriculturists.”

She smiled.

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Photo caption: Gaye Pfeiffer is shown at the family’s farm north of Mulhall in Logan County.

