

Former Local Girl Wins Farm Woman of Year

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By CO LEBER

Sally Patrick didn't know the difference between sweet corn and field corn when she married an Illinois farm boy almost 20 years ago.

She learned to distinguish them quickly along with a multitude of other skills necessary for a farmer's wife and this month was named Wirnebago Farm Woman of the Year by the Farm Bureau.

"The first I was outside of Alaska was Christmas of 1954 when I came down to meet Maurice's family," the Fairbanks Native said. The next year she was married and living on the farm at 2465 Centerville Road.

"My first job on the farm was driving the tractor when hay was being loaded into the barn," she said, smiling as she recalled her first experience.

Plowing, discing planting, harvesting and other farming activities soon were added to her list of duties for helping the 600 acres the family farms.

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The Patricks run what is termed a "family farm." Of the six family members, five are tractor drivers and three are milkers.

Patrick children are Maureen, 17; Susan, 15; Terry, 10; and Craig, 2½.

"I always tell my daughters that once you learn how to drive a tractor, you can try almost anything," Mrs. Patrick said.

"But if you see any crooked rows in the fields, they're mine," she chuckled.

"My favorite job, though, is combining. I really like that," she said. "Although I do love the smell of the new fresh dirt when I'm plowing in the spring."

Her husband added that combining might be a favorite because "it means the end of the year."

The end of the growing season means more time for inside activities such as sewing, knitting and crocheting, although Mrs. Patrick also assists with milking.

Mrs. Patrick's hardy background has helped her make the transition from city to country girl and from Alaskan to mid-western life.

She is the granddaughter of one of the first three white settlers in Alaska, Alfred Mayo, who settled in Rampart and is half Athabaskan Indian.

Her life in the most northern state, though, didn't prepare her for the lightning and thunder storms and the wind on the prairies of Illinois.

"It doesn't blow so much up there," she said. "And it's dry up there. You can dress for it even if it's cold. Here it's damp and hard to dress."

"Imagine," her husband added. "We used to date at 40 or 50 below zero."

One of the biggest differences she noticed was the faster pace of life.

"I remember when the city had scramble lights downtown. When the bell rang everyone rushed across the street. I couldn't believe it at first," she said.

Last summer, the family took the 72 hour, non-stop, 3,500-mile drive to Fairbanks to visit Mrs. Patrick's family. She is the only member of her family now living on the "Outside" as Alaskans refer to anything outside the state.

Back at home when she's not busy on the farm, Mrs. Patrick takes time out for bowling once a week and was a 4-H leader and Sunday school teacher for several years.

When she discovered that she had been nominated for Farm Woman of the Year, she said, "I was shocked. My mother-in-law, Mrs. Sam Patrick, nominated me."

Her mother-in-law was the first person she called when she she won the award. A later call to Alaska followed.

"I always thought part of a farmer's wife's duty was to help him out," Mrs. Patrick said. "I never thought I'd get an award for that."

"I just hope I don't start paying her wages," her husband said. "I very seldom have a sick day, but she's there and can do anything if I am."