

2017 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Cristen Clark - IMFH Class of 2017

Polk County

By Rod Swoboda

Cristen Clark has several qualities that draw people to her. One that shines proudly is the passion she has for her family and farm.

At the heart of the family is their farm — actually, two farms. Cristen helps her dad, mom and sister farm cropland where Cristen grew up near Prairie City in central Iowa, and Cristen and husband Mike raise pigs on their own farm nearby at Runnells.

Cristen and Mike have a small seedstock herd of 25 sows farrow to finish. These are purebred sows — Duroc, Hampshire and Yorkshire.

They also sell pigs for 4-H and FFA projects. The Clarks enter local and national livestock shows, including the Iowa State Fair. They also have a commercial hog feeding operation.

At the 2017 Iowa State Fair, daughter Halle won the Grand Champion Hampshire Gilt blue ribbon and son Barrett won Grand Champion Duroc Gilt honors.

Cristen is hands-on with farm work, assisting where needed during planting season. In the fall, she hauls grain from the fields as her father, Rodger Slings, harvests corn and soybeans. Cristen works with the sows and pigs daily.

Mike and Cristen involve their two children, Halle and Barrett, on the farm. It's a lifestyle and learning experience Cristen grew up with and is eager to share with her kids. Halle is in third grade; Barrett is in kindergarten. "There is no better place for them to learn about life than on the farm," says Cristen.

Advocating for agriculture

Cristen works from her home part time, doing public relations consulting and advocating for agriculture. Her clients have included the Iowa Food and Family Project, Anderson-Erickson Dairy, Iowa Pork Producers Association, Iowa Egg Council and Iowa Soybean Association.

Cristen created her popular blog, foodandswine.com, in 2014. It allows her to speak on behalf of production agriculture, and she has a lot of followers.

She ties in her love of cooking, family and agriculture as she weaves farm stories into recipe posts. Writing about food, she attracts readers and shares a story with them about farm life, helping build public trust in today's agriculture. She listens to people's concerns and beliefs about the food they eat, and the animals and crops farmers raise. She takes time to thoughtfully answer questions.

"People like to know where their food comes from," says Cristen. "I explain how it is raised and why we do it this way. There is a lot of criticism of modern production agriculture, especially on social media. People who are against how we farm and raise livestock often use fear and scare tactics to attack farmers.

"It was not my goal to be an outspoken crusader for modern agriculture, but rather a resource for people to access when they have questions about food and farming," she says.

When Cristen isn't doing chores or taking care of her family, she likes to cook and bake. She spends time testing recipes. Before starting her blog, she entered and won cooking and baking contests for several years. "I began the blog to write about food, as people

were asking me about my recipes,” she says. “They must have seen my name on the food and baked goods I entered in the Iowa State Fair and other contests, and when I won I got a lot of requests. I’d handwrite the cinnamon roll and biscuit recipes for people, which took time, so I began the blog.”

Upon winning contests, Cristen sometimes received the Iowa Master Farm Homemaker cookbook as part of the prize. She has also judged food entries at the Iowa State Fair.

Cristen says she learned how to cook from her mom, Ceil Slings. “She should be getting the Master Farm Homemaker Award. I learned everything from her. She’s wonderful, strong, takes care of things; a very loving person.”

Cristen and Mike have a busy household. Cristen runs the home planner and ensures religious education, choir, sports and other activities of their children are handled. Nightly reading is a constant, as is observing Halle doing homework on the computer. Cristen volunteers at her children’s school, helping with fundraisers. She coaches Halle’s softball and basketball teams.

Between flexible schedules and a commitment to assist where needed, the Clarks handle it. Both sets of grandparents live nearby, and sisters of Mike and Cristen also help. The family enjoys fishing at their pond and family time with cousins.

When time allows, Cristen speaks at advocacy programs in support of agriculture — in Iowa and out of state. She recently addressed the Illinois Farm Bureau, the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, and the Mason City Chamber of Commerce.

“If you read her writing on foodandswine.com or listen to her public speaking, you see immediately why she deserves this award,” says Claire Masker, who helped nominate Cristen.



Kelly Keitzer - IMFH Class of 2017

Des Moines County

By Lynn Betts

What started as 4-H projects for their girls about 15 years ago soon became a part of everyday life for Kelly Keitzer, husband Bryan and their three daughters. An initial 10 ewes grew to a flock of 150, and showing lambs evolved to selling lambs to 4-H and FFA members eager to take high honors at county and state fairs and on the lamb show circuit.

“Our farming operation has been primarily corn and soybeans, and feeding hogs,” Kelly says. “But we wanted our girls to have the experience of raising livestock in 4-H. You

think about bucket-bottle calves, but cattle get too big too soon, so we thought lambs would be a better option.”

Kelly grew up in Mediapolis and was never in 4-H as a girl, but she didn't hesitate to jump in as a 4-H leader even before her girls got involved. Leadership in 4-H is something many of the women named Iowa Master Farm Homemakers have in common, including two of the four women being honored this year.

“We bought our first 10 ewes in 2003 from Perry and Lori Middlesworth at Fremont and are still working with them today,” Kelly says. “All three of our girls — Tayler, Kaci and Savannah — showed lambs. We didn't know what we were getting into when we started, but we've been lucky. The Middlesworths have been great mentors to us.”

The Keitzers sell show lambs to other exhibitors, as well as produce market lambs. The family has about 200 lambs by June each year.

“It takes a good crew, especially in lambing season when we can have 25 to 30 ewes giving birth in a four- to five-day span,” Kelly says. “We have a remote camera and keep watch with our phones. I alert Bryan if there's trouble, but I've pulled my share of lambs, dozens over the years. All the girls have, too; they're not girly-girls.”

Kelly helps with the marking of sheep, as sometimes temporary identification is needed. She also helps with vaccinating, feeding and other chores. “I'm out there at least twice a day during lambing,” she says. Kelly keeps all the records for the flock, using a spreadsheet for financial records and an app on her phone called Herd Boss to keep the history on every animal.

The bulk of the lambs go to market at Kalona, but the bigger money comes from the two dozen or so lambs they sell as show lambs each year.

As they phase out of the lamb business, the Keitzers' goal is to transition it to any of the girls who are interested. Kelly served on county fair committees for 4-H in Des Moines County, and Bryan served on the 4-H sheep committee for many years.



Linda Newberry - IMFH Class of 2017

Lee County

By Lynn Betts

Linda Newberry has been the bookkeeper for the family farm from day one. “I had budgeted my own money and kept a book for my own finances before Steve and I were married in 1970,” Linda says, “so it just made sense to us for me to keep the farm books, too.”

That included keeping all the records for a Pioneer seed corn dealership she and Steve ran for 43 years. They've now given the seed corn business up, but Linda still keeps the farm books. "Now I use Quicken for our records," Linda says. "Using a computer to keep records is so much nicer than the old way by hand."

But the 2017 Master Farm Homemaker did much more than keep books: She was the face of the business, sitting behind the desk, answering the phone, and taking and filling orders while Steve planted their own corn. The couple grows corn and soybeans on about 2,000 acres and runs a cow-calf operation near Argyle in Lee County in southeast Iowa.

Family seed business

"In our early days, we had a party line. The phone would ring at the office and to our home phone," Linda explains. "I was only half a mile away from where the seed was stored, so I could usually get there in time to meet a customer and fill his order. We later moved everything here."

"Linda's bookkeeping and budgeting skills helped keep us accountable," Steve says. "She made sure we were making good decisions monetarily. She also did what was necessary to help make ends meet when she worked off the farm in tough times." Linda worked full time in town during the farm crisis of the 1980s, and worked at the Farm Service Agency during the drought of 1988. She also ran a scale off and on for five years, weighing trucks at a nearby quarry.

On prison duty

When hog prices were going down in the early 1990s, Linda took a job as a correctional officer at the state penitentiary in Fort Madison.

"We had just bought out Steve's dad, Dale, so we were strapped financially. I had submitted an application for the job years before I got the job offer. It had been kept on file and it just happened that they had the job opening at that time. I thought it was just meant to be for me to have that job," Linda says.

"I didn't mind the work, and it was a good paycheck. I delivered meds to the inmates, and worked the yard and cell houses for five years," she says. "You were always on your guard, but most of the time if you treated the prisoners all the same and respected them, they respected you. You could be nice, but don't be their friend."

'Pray hard'

Linda came from an all-girl family, but she and Steve raised four boys. One of the four sons, Jason, farms with them. Joshua, who lives near Argyle, owns and operates a landscape business. James is a regional sales manager for a seed company in the Pacific Northwest.

"Mom has always told us to pray hard, and to change the world globally by changing the world locally," James says. Steve and Linda's youngest son, Jacob, works as a missionary in Africa. Linda and Steve have 17 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Serving as membership chair, Linda was on the local board of the Iowa Farm Bureau for two years. She started a Camp Fire Girls group, but found 4-H worked better than scouts in the country.

"So I started a 4-H club in 1971 we called Corn Country Cousins, and led that club for about 20 years," Linda says.

She also volunteered with the Handy Helpers 4-H Club when her sons were young members.

Devoted teacher of youth

Linda was a Sunday school teacher for 40 years and taught Bible school for many years. She and Steve attend Cowboy Country Church in Wayland on Tuesdays and Cornerstone Church in Keokuk on Sundays.

Last year, Linda experienced something few Iowans have: She was baptized in the Jordan River while she was on a trip to Israel with her church group.

Linda's international experience was also enriched with a trip to Africa with Steve to see their son Jacob be married. Worldly experience came to Linda in two separate years when she and Steve hosted foreign exchange students in their home through FFA.

A student named Bjorn visited from Germany and a second, Karill, visited from Ukraine. The Newberrys also hosted high school students from the city, so they could experience life on the farm.

More recently, Linda taught preschool for a year, where three of her grandchildren were in the class. Just last year, Linda was recognized by the Iowa secretary of state for serving 24 years, the longest of any precinct election official in Lee County.



Katie Olthoff - IMFH Class of 2017

Hamilton County

AG RESOURCE: "My Family's Dairy Farm" is the ninth in a series by Katie Olthoff, Iowa children's book author. Olthoff writes the books for the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation to provide nonfiction, ag-based resources to schools. Tyler Harris A new nonfiction book by children's author Katie Olthoff tells the story of raising cows and producing milk on an Iowa farm. "My Family's Dairy Farm" is available by request free for students and teachers from the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation.

The story follows Lucas, an 8-year-old boy in Iowa who helps on his family's dairy farm. Lucas takes readers on a tour of the farm and discusses how his family cares for the cows, which produce milk that is made into cheese and other dairy products. He discusses the quality care the cows receive and other aspects of sustainability that the farm practices. The book is written at a third grade reading level and has supplemental text that gives additional background information for more advanced readers.

The book is the ninth in a series by Olthoff, a former teacher who understands the importance of having high-quality, relevant nonfiction books for students. Iowa Core educational standards require that up to 50% of student reading be informational or

nonfiction. Olthoff writes the books for the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation to provide nonfiction, ag-based resources to schools.

Importance of dairy

“Milk is the third-largest beverage category. Dairy production is important and essential to the food supply,” says Will Fett, IALF executive director. “‘My Family’s Dairy Farm’ offers the opportunity to teach about how cows are cared for and how milk can be used for a variety of dairy products, including cheese, yogurt, ice cream and so much more. We can also discuss important topics like sustainability and protecting natural resources.”

Olthoff lives on a working turkey farm in central Iowa with her husband and family. Her first book detailed how turkeys were raised on their family farm. She currently works for ChopLocal as director of communications. She is active in the agriculture community in Iowa and beyond as a volunteer for Common Ground, a national network of farm women who share information on food and farming with consumers across the country. She has experience teaching and communicating about agriculture with her blog.

Health and technology

The book features the technology used on dairy farms to track production and health of cows. It explains the feed rations that create a healthy diet for cows. It explains how milk is collected, tested and then transported to the processor to become cheese.

“Understanding where milk and dairy products come from is important,” says Jenna Finch of Midwest Dairy. “This book will help students connect the dots between the high-quality care the cows receive and the tasty dairy product that they get to enjoy.”

Copies of the book are being made available to all Iowa elementary schools and additional copies are available on request. The book is a special project of IALF with financial support from Midwest Dairy. The book also has two lesson plan companion resources to help teachers integrate the book into a science or social studies lesson. The lesson plans are aligned with Iowa Core standards and easily fit into an approved course of study.

For more information about the book or other education resources, contact IALF at info@iowaagliteracy.org.