

2018 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Mary Klaes - IMFH Class of 2018

Mitchell County

By Rod Swoboda

As a partner in the family farm, Mary Klaes does the financial record-keeping for their crop production and cattle feeding operation. She served as a 4-H leader for 13 years, has volunteered with the Osage FFA chapter the past 12 years and is a longtime community leader.

Married to husband Curt for 30 years, they raised five children, now successful young adults. Actively involved in their northern Iowa farm, Mary works side by side with Curt.

“I couldn’t do any of this community work if I didn’t have the support of my family,” Mary says. “I rely on them to cover my other responsibilities when I can’t, when I’m out and about with my activities. It’s all about teamwork; that’s for sure. As Curt says, it takes more than one person to hold the team together.”

For years Mary has been among the most visible proponents for development of young leaders and higher education in Mitchell County through her work as a 4-H leader and with Osage FFA. She has recruited and nurtured many students in her volunteer role and has shaped community leaders through these programs.

Volunteering takes commitment

Mary has taught students the importance of public speaking, leadership and community service. She encourages youth to be involved, shows them they are contributing members and gives them self-worth. Mary is committed and caring, says Darla Olson, director of Iowa State University Extension in Mitchell County.

“She’s out in front, not only in the way she has led, but in her ability to recruit other community members to serve in the role as mentors and teachers,” Olson says. “Mary is viewed as an extraordinary role model and an inspiration to others in the skill of ‘giving back.’ An outstanding farm professional, mentor, teacher and volunteer, she is a leader for our community.”

Mary and Curt’s oldest son, Joe, recently moved back to the area to farm. Joe, an ag engineering graduate, and wife Laura have twin 3-year-old daughters.

Mary and Curt have three daughters. Elizabeth is an editor for Our Iowa magazine in Ames; Katie is a grain marketer for Cargill in Ohio; and Laura is a sales trainee for AgReliant Genetics in Ames.

Their youngest child, Matthew, is a student at Iowa State University, earning a degree in chemistry. Their older children all graduated from ISU. Mary and Curt are graduates of Loras College in Dubuque.

Giving back to community

Other organizations and activities Mary is involved in include teaching religious education classes to students at church; she’s taught these classes for 20-plus years. Mary also assists with child care for young parents who attend monthly MOPS (Mothers of Preschool) meetings, to enable young moms to enjoy some fellowship and grow in their parenting skills.

Lisa Peterson, one of the people nominating Mary for the 2018 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker Award, has worked with Mary in MOPS, the Osage FFA Chapter and Senior Interview Day. She helped Mary coach the FFA Ag Sales Team to a state championship.

“An outsider to the ag program could have easily mistaken Mary for the ag instructor,” Peterson says. “Mary has coached and coordinated multiple individuals and teams at the sub-district and state levels.”

While working with high school students, Mary recognized many had never filled out a job application or practiced interviewing for a job. Mary took it upon herself to fix the problem, and Senior Interview Day was developed.

MENTOR: Mary Klaes, who enjoys working with youth, helps students run the FFA food stand at Mitchell County Fair. With Mary are Ashley Hanson (center), parent of an FFA student, and Michelle Wright, a recent graduate of Osage FFA. Coordinating with school administrators, she organized a morning for every senior to go through a “practice” interview for a job within their field of interest. She brought in community leaders and local businesspeople as interviewers. It was an eye-opener for many of the students.

Providing opportunities

“We’ve done this for two years now,” Mary says. “It’s been a successful learning experience.” Students learn how to present themselves in an interview, how to write a resume, cover letter, things to avoid. They learn how to dress: what business casual and business professional mean. Each student participates in a mock interview.

“Mary is a consummate professional and gets the job done,” Peterson says. “I’m still surprised at all the places in the community I run into Mary, especially now that her last child has graduated high school. Yet, Mary still attends graduation, sports events, choral events, etc. Shortly after those events, she will typically post photos to her Facebook page for parents and others to see and download. Mary is a freelance photographer for our local newspaper and contributes photos to Our Iowa magazine.”

Mary is not the type of person who is looking for accolades or awards; “she just has a humble heart of service,” Peterson says. “This year, the Osage FFA Chapter created and awarded the FFA Mary Klaes Award. The award honors people who have helped the chapter reach its greatest potential. Rightfully, she was the first recipient of the award. The world needs more Marys. It is my pleasure to highly recommend Mary for the Iowa Master Farm Homemaker Award.”



Mary Ann Kunde - IMFH Class of 2018

Jackson County

By Lynn Betts

Bookkeeper, bill-payer, cook, human resources head, logistics coordinator, mental health coach, teacher, social coordinator, caring neighbor and parent, and community leader. That’s the short version the people nominating Mary Ann Kunde as a 2018

Master Farm Homemaker used to describe her contributions to her farm, family and community.

“She’s the glue that holds everything together,” says her husband, Gary. “She pays the bills and makes sure we’re all well fed, and she’ll drop everything to run for a part replacement, or to move equipment between farms. I don’t think people realize just how valuable that is in busy times on the farm.”

The Kundes raised three daughters — Bobbi, Sara and Stacey — on their 500-acre farm in Jackson County. They now operate 1,800 acres.

Mary Ann is most proud of the work she’s done to organize and carry out vacation Bible school for a week each year for about 40 children in the Andrew area.

She’s always recruiting people to help, especially to take on acting roles in the Bible story re-enactments she oversees.

“When I walk down the street, people see me coming and duck into doorways to hide,” Mary Ann jokes, “because they know I’m looking for volunteers for the skits. Gary even put on a wig and robe one year to play Moses. That was out of his comfort zone and it meant a lot to me that he would do that.”

Mary Ann’s girls often come back to help, too.

“It gives me a warm feeling when some of the kids will ask me when Bible school is going to be the next year,” Mary Ann says. “That says you might be making a difference.”

In that regard, Mary Ann and Gary made a difference in the life of a complete stranger when they hosted a foreign exchange student from Germany in 1995.

Together We Build

“Mary Ann and I first crossed paths years ago when I was a 4-H program assistant and she was supporting her daughters in 4-H,” says Judy Tonderum.

“She worked a number of years as a dispatcher in the county sheriff’s office, and learned to be calm, patient and precise. I believe that’s good in everyday living and helps her be a good leader in the community,” Tonderum says.

Tonderum serves with Mary Ann on a fundraising committee for the “Together We Build” campaign to build a new Extension Outreach building on the Jackson County fairgrounds.

“Mary Ann stepped forward to chair one of the first fundraisers,” Judy says. “She gathered friends and neighbors to make pie crusts and peel bushels of donated apples on several occasions, took orders from the general public, and organized pickup schedules for more than 460 pies that were sold to add a healthy sum to the building fund.”

“She’s a bundle of energy, a loving mother, grandmother and wife who is always ready to help others,” adds Wanda Cornelius, who has also worked on projects with Mary Ann.

Strong sense of community

Mary Ann is active in the Andrew Betterment Club and at Sacred Heart Church. She’s also served as the Richland Township secretary for more than 10 years and has managed the polls at elections for more than six years.

HELPING HAND: Mary Ann called on friends to help peel bushels of donated apples and make pie crusts, and then took orders and scheduled pickups for more than 460 ready-to-bake pies during the holiday season last year to raise money for a new

Extension outreach center. Mary Ann volunteers at the Jackson County Fair, checking in open-class projects and helping the judge.

Last year, she was president of the Petal Pals Garden Club in Andrew. She's a guest reader and craft planner at the Andrew library, and has occasionally been a guest reader at a preschool her daughter Sara owns and operates in Huxley.

Cottonville Farms legacy

Mary Ann is a sounding board for key decisions on the farm and has played a role in legacy planning for the next generation that will take over Cottonville Farms.

When Mary Ann's three daughters indicated they wouldn't be taking over the family farm, she and Gary sought out a young man who they could help give a start in farming.

The couple has been working with and mentoring Wes and Emily Hosch for the past 12 years, helping them prepare to carry forward the Cottonville Farm legacy. "Wes isn't a hired man. He and Emily are our partners and are like family," Mary Ann says. Wes and Emily share the feeling.

"Mary Ann is a very hardworking, honest, kind and caring woman, and I feel fortunate to know her and work beside her and Gary for the past 12 years," Wes says. "We're not related, but I feel like family."



Fran Mueller - IMFH Class of 2018

Bremer County

By Rod Swoboda

ISU SWEETHEARTS: Fran and Howard Mueller met at Iowa State University. "Fran has always found ways to share her talents to help improve the lives of others," Howard says. In the early 1980s in the cab of a combine, Fran Mueller and a friend shared with one another their concerns about their families and rural Iowa. It was the beginning of the 1980s farm crisis, a period of severe financial turmoil in agriculture with low crop and livestock prices, plummeting land values, and lots of red ink. The stress on farm families was intense. But wringing of hands is not in Fran's wheelhouse; constructive action is.

With her neighbor, Fran organized a gathering of families, each with a unique situation, but all feeling the unrelenting financial pressure of the time. The families began meeting monthly to discuss positive steps that could help each family survive the stresses and prepare to thrive in the future. Together, they did just that.

Originally from Ohio and a graduate of Bowling Green State University, Fran taught at Iowa State University where she met Howard Mueller, who was in graduate school. In 1958, following their marriage, Fran's farming career began when she returned with Howard to farm in Bremer County in northeast Iowa.

She quickly learned how to operate machinery and handle and care for hogs and cattle.

Fran and Howard raised two sons, Mark and Steve. Today, Mark and his family farm with Fran and Howard. Steve, a small-business owner, lives with his family at Van Meter. Both sons are ISU grads. Fran and Howard have four granddaughters.

Fran also taught at Wartburg College in Waverly and at St. Paul's Lutheran elementary school.

Fran and Howard are "retired" but stay active by participating in church and community activities, and helping Mark farm. Fran is the treasurer for Mueller Farms.

Leadership extends beyond Iowa

Fran's leadership extends well beyond the family farm and Iowa. She's active in the global ag community through her work with Self-Help International, headquartered in Waverly.

GOOD WORK: Self-Help projects are reaching impoverished people in western Africa and Central America, helping them learn how to improve their food production, Fran Mueller says.

During her 23 years of service on the Self-Help board, including 12 years as chair, Fran helped guide the development of staff, expansion of community involvement, and the organization's work to develop improved seed and farming methods for farmers in Nicaragua and Ghana.

"Fran is a leader in all that she does and makes better every group she interacts with by sharing her time and talent," says Nora Tobin, executive director of Self-Help.

"In such a small organization with just two full-time U.S. staff members, our board members play a very important and active role in this nonprofit organization's success," Tobin says.

"Fran served as board chair for over a decade, and under her tenure, Self-Help was able to open a new country program and triple its operating budget," she says. "Fran has visited the farm families we serve in Ghana and Nicaragua many times, always at her own expense, to listen to their needs, see the progress they're making, encourage them, and ensure that Self-Help is serving their needs the best way possible. She is unwavering in her commitment to help people help themselves."

As chair of Allen Hospital Board in Waterloo, Fran was instrumental in the elevation of Allen's School of Nursing to Allen College of Nursing. She was the first woman elected to the Allen Hospital Board and served for 23 years — 12 years as chairperson.

Fran and Howard have hosted international students studying at Wartburg College and other international guests on the farm.

Fran is active in Bible study and book clubs. She sings in the church choir (50-plus years) and is a member of Waverly Community Symphony Association. Fran also enjoys sewing as a hobby.

Strong ties to family farm

The Muellers' sons say they admire their parents' accomplishments and care for others. The entire family is involved with the annual planting and harvest. They also enjoy canoeing, biking and traveling together. The grandparents especially enjoy time with their grandchildren.

At St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, Fran helped develop the physical education program for kindergarten through sixth grade. She served as president of the congregation at St. Paul's, and on committees of the PEO philanthropic group and Waverly Rotary.

Fran completed coursework at the University of Northern Iowa for a master's in teaching English to speakers of other languages. She has an honorary doctorate from Allen College of Nursing, honoring her years of service on the board.

Digging archaeology

As a young girl, Fran became interested in archaeology. After her children were grown, she applied to a program coordinated by five different U.S. universities and became a team leader of volunteer archeologists in Israel.

Every summer for five years she participated in the dig. "Our dig was in a farming area in southern Israel," Fran says. "I observed agriculture in a country that's very challenged by lack of moisture. But with drip irrigation and water management, they produced impressive crops. It was an interesting learning experience and I enjoyed teaching and working with the students."

The Rev. Dennis Dickman, in a letter of support for Fran's Master Farm Homemaker nomination, says "I've known Fran Mueller for almost 40 years, serving as her pastor for 17 of those years. She is one of the most gifted and caring persons I've ever met."



Helen Wieben - IMFH Class of 2018

Tama County

By Lynn Betts

Master Farm Homemaker: Although Helen Wieben is now retired and has moved to town, she remains a tireless volunteer in the community.

CIVIC-MINDED: Iowa Master Farm Homemaker Helen Wieben is still very active in the community of Dysart and is involved with the family farm.

Helen Wieben pitched in at the family farm in Tama County, Iowa, for years, raising three children, milking cows by hand, growing a big garden, catering meals, decorating cakes and helping with church activities. More recently, the 2018 Master Farm Homemaker has put just as much of her managerial skill and energy into community service for the town of Dysart.

Helen and husband Dennis grew corn, soybeans and oats on gently rolling land; fed cattle and hogs; and for eight years had a dairy operation on what would be recognized in 2009 as a Century Farm a few miles south of Dysart. "We always had a big garden, and I cooked and took hundreds of meals to the field," Helen says.

SHE DOES IT: Helen Wieben uses a golf cart to get to her volunteer work at the city park in Dysart. She's been very involved in building a new gazebo, in flower and tree plantings in the park, and beautification projects overall.

Milking routine

"When we milked cows in the 1950s, I did most of the evening milking: four to six Brown Swiss by hand. I remember the kids were small. I hung them in their car seats on the wall while I milked. It wasn't the best, but it seemed like the only thing I could do to get the milking done and watch them at the same time."

Such multitasking served Helen well as she kept the books (she knew where every penny went) and helped Dennis in all things on the farm. She also ran a cake decoration business for more than a decade, which led to a busy catering business she ran out of her home for 13 years.

"We'd cater for 20 to 300 people at a time, sometimes three meals a week," Helen recalls. "There were a lot of weddings and anniversaries, and many Pioneer meetings. I had five ladies helping."

At the same time, Helen was in the midst of teaching both Sunday school and Bible school at Zion Lutheran Church, which she did for more than 20 years. She attends adult Sunday school yet today and chairs a women's group at the church. A member for 63 years, she sang in the choir, served as junior high choir director for eight years, and helped with church meals and fundraising events.

She's still active, most recently helping make 15 gallons of ice cream in five freezers and helping serve a complete meal to 160 people to raise money for college scholarships for Zion Lutheran high school students.

Education a priority

"Growing up, we always had farm chores before and after school," says daughter Michelle Bruce, "but homework was always the priority. Our family vacations were fun but had learning experiences tied in. We were always told that asking questions was a way to learn without books, and hands-on work experience was worth a lot."

Michelle is project coordinator at Karr Tuckpointing in Vinton, and brothers Michael and Mitchell are operating the family farm.

The learning-through-travel didn't stop for Helen and Dennis once the children were grown. They started traveling internationally in 1980, with trips to Australia, Africa, New Zealand and Europe.

On one trip, they visited Yves Montoille, a foreign exchange student from France, whom they hosted for a year in their home. They also traveled to every state in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

Helen still has a chance to help family members learn. She has seven grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, 11 step-great-grandchildren and three more on the way.

Put others first

Despite all that travel for fun, Helen and Dennis were constantly putting other people first as they volunteered in Dysart in many ways. After the couple retired from farming and moved to Dysart, Dennis served as mayor and board member for the bank and school board. Dennis and Helen helped organize the Dysart Historical Ag Museum and were the sole groundskeepers for years. Dennis was on the Dysart tree board and Helen was on the beautification committee.

Dennis passed away in 2013, but Helen has continued their legacy of community service. She continues to serve on the museum board, helps take care of the flowers and roses on the grounds, and volunteers as a tour guide at the museum. She's volunteered at the Dysart Historical Society since its inception.

A member of the park board, Helen was instrumental in building a new gazebo in the park patterned after the original one. She helped start the gardens in the city park and continues to help maintain them. That's in addition to maintaining her own gardens; her yard is one of the stops on garden tours and garden walks in town.

"I guess I couldn't say no," Helen says of her selfless giving to the community. A longtime active leader and member of the Dysart Women's Club, Helen was named Woman of the Year in 2015. She and Dennis were named citizens of the year by the Lions Club as well, along with other honors.

