

2018

Miriam Leatherman

Miriam Leatherman has served the agriculture community faithfully for many years. Along with her husband George, she operates Buena Vista Farm located in the Old Fields area of Hardy County. The farm consists of 198 acres of prime farmland, which also includes poultry houses and a beef cattle operation. In 2011, Miriam began strawberry production on the farm. What started as a ¼ acre plot has now increased to over ½ acre. These berries are sold locally to various schools, as well as through pick-your-own on the farm. Miriam began strawberry production to provide nutritious food for locals, as she served as the WVU Hardy County Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent from 1982-2011 as well as previously holding that same position in Monongalia and Harrison counties. As of 2014, Miriam has expanded her operation by growing asparagus and salad greens, as well as producing value-added products such as strawberry syrup and pumpkin butter. Miriam is a role model for the agriculture and conservation community and is very committed to serving the residents of Hardy county and surrounding areas. When asked for advice to give other women in agriculture, she stated, "It's important to find your growing niche."

Cynthia A. Martel

Handling everything from community and rural development to grant writing and administration, Cynthia "Cindy" Martel has made a huge impact on West Virginia agriculture. Cindy was hired as a Marketing Specialist with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture in 1994 and was the first to encourage the WVDA to get behind the agritourism movement. However, her involvement in agriculture started before her employment with WVDA. Cindy grew up in Vermont, raising and showing sheep, helping out on her grandparent's dairy, doing a little maple syrup and being an overall "farm kid." She didn't know it then, but her rural background would go on to shape the rest of her life. After attending the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for her bachelor's degree in Ag Business, Cindy moved to West Virginia in 1988. Cindy and her family operated Red Roof Farms, Inc., a gourmet food company in Fayetteville. She has played a leading role in the growth of West Virginia's maple syrup industry as co-administrator of West Virginia's Produce Safety Grant and much more. Cindy is an inspiration to many. Agriculture isn't just a job, it's her passion.

Lynn Benedict

Since 1973, Lynn Benedict has raised Alpine and Nubian dairy goats in Greenbrier County. Lynn co-founded the Mountain State Dairy Goat Association, been a leading factor in the beginnings of the dairy goat show at the State Fair of West Virginia and served two, three-year terms on the American Dairy Goat Association Board of Directors. She is currently chair of Advanced Judges. Beginning in 1975, Lynn participated in ADGA (American Dairy Goat Association) national shows. She began exhibiting in 1988 and, in that year, her Nubian doe was Reserve National Champion. She has competed in national shows across the country, and over the years, her Alpine goats have won many awards. Some of her breeding stock have been sent to Canada, Mexico, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic. Lynn's farm consists of three fenced-in acres that includes a goat barn with electric milking machines. Her herd is at about 20 goats. Her loyalty and care for her goats, combined with community service, makes her an ideal woman of agriculture. When asked for advice to give other women in agriculture, she suggested, "Make sure you love it because it takes lots of work."

Jewell Plumley, DVM

Raised on a sheep and beef farm in Raleigh County, and a daughter of a WVU Extension Agent and Elementary School Teacher, Jewell Plumley knows the value of agriculture to West Virginia. As the first woman to be the West Virginia State Veterinarian and Director of the Animal Health Division, Dr. Plumley has made a huge impact on the agriculture industry for many years. Throughout her years of service as a veterinarian, she strived to help farmers across West Virginia improve their management and herd health. Endlessly devoting her time to helping 4-H and FFA students in a variety of areas, Jewell has always devoted her time to educating youth on animal health practices. Dr. Plumley was honored as one of six women in the United States as a state veterinarian during her career. As someone who has devoted her life to animal health and well-being, Dr. Plumley has helped many people grow in the agriculture industry, proving her to be a true woman of agriculture. When asked for advice to give to other women in agriculture, her words were simple, "Go for it."