

Female ROP tester enjoying her work on Halton farms

Some Tremaine Rd. farmers did a double take last week when a 1976 gold Duster pulled into their driveway and a dark-haired young woman got out and introduced herself as the new R.O.P. tester.

For although women broke into this traditionally "all male" occupation as long as five years ago, there are still only six female "Record of Performance" testers in all of Canada—and Sheila Armstrong is the first of them ever to work in this area.

And, for this reason, farmers are understandably caught off guard by her introduction.

Expect sales pitch
"Everyone expects me to say I'm a salesperson or a Jehovah's Witness," she laughed. "Their expressions really change when they find out what I'm there for."

(The initial assumption that she is a peddler is prevalent because she arrives with suitcase and government testing kit in tow.)

Sheila's job with the Department of Agriculture requires that she be on hand for both the morning and evening milkings at each farm she visits.

And having her home in St. Paul's (near Stratford) makes daily commuting impossible, so Sheila gets to try out a new bed virtually every night.

She said she usually drops in at a government-designated farm at about 3 or 4 p.m. and gets ready to take samples from the evening milking.

When two ounces of milk are secured and labelled from each cow, she locks the samples in a metal box for the night and goes inside to have supper with the farm family and usually spends the evening with them.

In the morning, she has breakfast with the family who were total strangers less than 24 hours before and heads for the barn to get samples from the morning milking.

She then mixes the "a.m." and "p.m." samples from each cow together, and tests for butterfat content after centrifuging them with some sulfuric acid.

With her work out of the way by 10 or 11 a.m., Sheila is often invited to stay at the farm for lunch before heading off on her next assignment usually just up the road.

Bookkeeping
The afternoons are hers to enjoy, but she sometimes uses them to do the bookkeeping work that goes with the job.

This includes recording the weights of the cows and calculating butterfat percentages on special forms to be sent to the Production and Marketing Branch of the Department of Agriculture's Livestock Division.

She goes home to stay with her parents on their dairy farm in St. Paul's nearly every weekend, and said she is able to work weekends through when she wants to take three or four days off together during the week.

"The farmers don't care when I come," she explained. "They always tell me it's a seven day a week job and they have to be there anyway."

But the flexible hours are only one of the things Sheila likes about her job as R.O.P. tester a position she's held for three months.

Great for travel
"It's great for travelling and meeting people," the former 4-H'er said. "You can take all sorts of back roads in the country that you'd never have a chance to see driving to work every day on the highway."

"And you never know where you're going to be two weeks apart or who is going to open the next door."

She spent July testing milk at farms in Erin, Acton, Rockwood, Moffat and Guelph and now has a list of herds in Oakville and Milton to visit.

"But I could be sent to Brampton or the other side of the 401 next week," she said. "You always have to be up and ready to move."

Get used to her
Sheila claims it's not as difficult as it sounds to have new meal partners and lodgings every day.

Most of the farm families are used to having an R.O.P. tester drop by every four or five weeks, so after a while you both just sort of learn to get along," she philosophized.

And, of course, having the farm background that Sheila



PRECISION is important when testing butterfat levels in milk for federal government records. This specially marked straw tube device ensures R.O.P. tester Sheila Armstrong that exactly 17.6 ml of milk are mixed with 17.5 ml of sulfuric acid—every time. When the mixture has been centrifuged for five minutes and turns black, Sheila adds hot water and watches the butterfat rise.

does is a tremendous asset when conversing over the dinner table.

While growing up on her parents' dairy farm she spent several years as a "Junior Farmer" and also belonged to 11 agricultural and 19 homemaking clubs during her years as a 4-H'er.

Ontario Furrow Queen
She was chosen Dairy Princess for her county and went on to become Ontario Furrow Queen in 1973-74.

It was Sheila who helped promote the International Plowing Match in Georgetown that year, and she said she got to know a number of people in Halton County that autumn through George Swann and Roy Downs, the match publicity chairman.

As her general region includes the municipalities of Halton, Peel and Hamilton Wentworth, she said she has an occasional reunion with friends she met back then

doing in the future?

"I plan to finish my B.A. in music through correspondence courses at the University of Waterloo in the fall," she said, but quickly stressed her singing and piano playing are more of a hobby than anything.

"I'm going to be an R.O.P. tester until I'm 92 years old," she vowed.

Conservation parks close soon—CVCA

Terra Cotta Conservation Area is closing this year on September 20 with weekend camping only after Labor Day. The pool is available for weekends only until September 20, and will be open from noon to 6 p.m.

The cutbacks are necessary, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority announces, because summer staff is made up primarily of students and they soon return to school.

Bellmountain area is open until after the Thanksgiving weekend, October 10, but there are no lifeguards after Labor Day.

Potato Fest profit for arena

All proceeds of the Hillsburgh Potato Fest will go toward a new arena for the village this year. The arena was condemned and is being demolished. The annual event is scheduled for Sept. 10 to 12, rain or shine.

The grand parade at noon on the Saturday draws entries from throughout the district. It's followed by an afternoon of events in the park.

Hillsburgh Country Bluegrass Jamboree will be underway Friday night, all afternoon and evening on Saturday. Lee Tocher plays for a dance at night.

Snowmobile drag races are a special event scheduled for Sunday.

Improve

Halton Regional Public Works staffers will investigate terms of a cost sharing program with the Ontario Jockey Club to pay for improvements to the Guelph Line.

The Ontario Jockey Club is expanding facilities at Mohawk Raceway by 40,000 square feet.

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SHEILA ARMSTRONG has been testing local farmers' milk for butterfat in recent weeks. The 21-year-old is the first female R.O.P. tester ever to work in this area. She was the 1973-74 Ontario Furrow Queen and helped promote the International Plowing Match in Georgetown that year.

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