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## Kate Geppert: How one dairy farmer supports herself and the industry

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Apr 22, 2021



Kate Geppert feeds her cows in March at her farm in Kingdom City. Geppert's family has lived in the property since the early 1900s, and she continues the legacy by caring for the animals.

In 1938, Kate Geppert's grandfather settled down on farmland in Kingdom City. Half a century later, the family's Holstein dairy cows continue to roam the property.

The dairy farm has changed over the years. Geppert had to commit to changes and raise fewer cattle because of a series of difficulties. For a while, she didn't even know what could possibly happen next.

Despite this, she continues to raise registered Holsteins in Callaway County and is also proactive about promoting awareness of agricultural practices. She has received a number of awards and filled multiple leadership positions that have enabled her to make a national impact on the dairy industry.

“I have been blessed and had the opportunity to do a lot of things,” she said.

## Renowned dairy farmer

Geppert, 53, graduated from MU in 1989 with a bachelor’s degree in agricultural journalism.

For over 20 years, she has been managing editor of the Mid-States Holstein News. She also works as a freelance journalist in the dairy industry.

She serves as president of the Missouri Dairy Hall of Honors and received the Dairy Leadership Award in 2018. This is a particularly meaningful award for Geppert.

“It proves that you have done something that makes a difference to the state,” she said.

## Life on the farm

Geppert and her 14-year-old daughter, Sophie, currently raise cattle on the farm and live in a house built on the same spot as her grandfather’s old home.

Geppert wakes up at 6 a.m. every day to take care of her cattle. She manages their diet and makes sure they have adequate water, especially in the winter. During calving season, she must check on them throughout the night.

Geppert said she counts on the help of her family and friends in the farming community. Within a mile of the farm are six houses belonging to members of her immediate family.

“Family is what created our farm, and family is what has kept it all together,” she said.

## The dairy community

Geppert also has friends in the dairy community that she said she can trust.

When she needs someone to watch the farm, Barry Steevens is there to help. Steevens is a retired state extension dairy specialist who pitches in when she is out of town.

When Geppert was dairy cattle superintendent of the Missouri State Fair, Steevens was the one who helped behind the scenes.

Geppert remembers telling him, “Barry, the pump isn’t working again,” and he would always show up to fix it.

Rex Ricketts, MU professor emeritus of animal sciences, was on the Dairy Hall of Honors Board with Geppert. He helps her maintain and emphasize the importance of dairy.

“They’re two really good guys that have been a really big influence on my life,” she said.

“They were always leaders that I looked up to.”

As a child, Geppert was in 4-H, a youth organization that introduces children to agriculture. Ricketts and Steevens both judged her cattle in Missouri 4-H dairy competitions, and they watched her grow up.

“Kate is strong-willed,” Steevens said. “It makes her a good leader. She is well respected in the dairy industry.”

Sophie continues the legacy by showing the family cattle in the same 4-H events.

Geppert actively works to teach others about agriculture and particularly the dairy industry.

She said she was proud to have been awarded the Distinguished Alumni Leader Award in 2010 by the Young Dairy Leaders Institute. For years, she has worked to stop the spread of misconceptions about the dairy industry.

“There are a lot of things that the public doesn’t understand,” she said. “Most people don’t realize what it takes to produce a gallon of milk.”

## Lifestyle changes

Her parents bought the dairy operation from her grandfather in the late 1970s. It transitioned from a farm with unregistered or grade dairy cattle to one with registered Holstein cattle.

There were no hired hands on the place. It was entirely run by family.

“You learned a lot of responsibility because things had to be done,” Geppert said.

By the 1990s, their herd was among the best in Missouri.

“At the time, we were one of the top producers in the state,” she said.

Then her mother had a spinal cord stroke on the Fourth of July weekend in 1997, a rare condition that left her partially paralyzed. It also changed the responsibilities on the farm, and most of the cattle were sold.

When Kate married Doug Geppert, they decided to move to Columbia. During that time, she was commuting between Columbia and the farm on a regular basis. At some point, Kate knew it was time to move back to the farm.

In 2008, the family made the decision to stop milking the cows. They were able to keep some of the milking animals and send them to a family friend in Linn to focus on the youngstock.

“It worked out well,” she said. “We were able to keep our bloodlines and genetics.”

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