

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Marjorie Moesel

Growing up on a diversified dairy farm in the 1940s meant learning about all aspects of animal husbandry, horticulture and farm life for young Marjorie Ball. Her life was focused on the family farm, their church and the 4-H program.

Her marriage to Richard Moesel in 1952 changed her name but other than that her life still revolves around agriculture, her church and Oklahoma 4-H activities and other youth development programs. She says helping young people develop talents and skills for a successful life keeps her active and satisfied.

"I've been a volunteer 4-H leader since I was 15 years old, I'm 86 now and I still love doing it." Moesel said. "That's over 70 years and I still love working with all the young people. Watching them work on skills and develop talents they don't think they can do and then seeing them learn how to do them is very rewarding."

Her own experience with 4-H began when she was in grade school, she said. "I was around seven to nine years old. I really can't remember."

Success came early as she won the 1948 national 4-H gardening program award and was named a National Achievement winner the following year. Moesel said these successes were followed by becoming a junior leader at 15 and later serving as president of the National Junior Vegetable Growers Association first as a 4-H member and later as an adult leader for over 20 years.

"Everyone worked hard but it was enjoyable because we liked what we were doing and working with the people we worked with," she said. "It was rewarding."

She has also worked extensively with FFA and 4-H programs to train for horticulture contests, speech and judging contests.

In 2011 Marjorie Moesel received an even greater reward when she was named the year's National 4-H Salute to Excellence Outstanding Lifetime Volunteer Award. This is the program's highest 4-H leadership award.

She is proud of the achievement but remains modest.

"It was very nice to receive it for sure," Moesel said. "That year the award was presented in Omaha Nebraska and I really enjoyed it."

It could have been a pinnacle moment, a time to accept the recognition and bow out of volunteering. Moesel wouldn't think of it.

"In 1963 my husband was badly hurt in a tractor accident while we were farming in Pauls Valley," she said. "For a while we didn't know if he was going to live and we didn't know how we were going to make it with little income and all of our expenses.

"But our friends and neighbors—some we didn't even know—stepped up to help us out with food and other things we needed to get through," Moesel said. "They gave us so much care and love and we always want to give that back in some way."

Today she continues to work with young people not just on 4-H or horticulture projects but through mentoring programs such as the Whiz Kids program. The needs of today's young people have changed but many of the basic skills they need to succeed remain the same.

"Oh yes, 4-H has changed a lot over the years," Moesel said. "All things change but that just means there are more possibilities. Some of the 4-H programs of years ago are not very common anymore but we still need to be well rounded and one important thing is public speaking."

Sometimes that means pushing young people to grow and achieve.

"We often don't expect enough out of our young people," Moesel said. "They are afraid of trying something and failing and need encouragement and mentoring to get over it. All kids can amount to something if we work with them to develop their talents."

She offered as example a young junior high school student who excels in art but struggled with public speaking. Through mentoring and hard work, the student competed in a speech contest and overcame some of her fear of public speaking.

"Her topics were good and she did a good job delivering her speech," Moesel said. "She didn't win the contest but she overcame her hardship of speaking in public."

The student also apparently learned something about paying back and helping others. Moesel said at a recent art contest the young lady earned \$250 for one of her entries and promptly donated the money to her school's art program.

"There aren't too many young people who would have done that," Moesel said. "Most would have kept the money for themselves."

Moesel and her husband owned and operated Moesel's Hort-Haven in Oklahoma City until her son Rodd Moesel took over the business and renamed it American Plant Products. She still works in the nursery up to six days per week.

"Horticulture is a good example of agriculture as a whole," she said. "Growing everything from flowers to fruits and vegetables—all things we depend on—there are a lot of things we can teach people about agriculture from horticulture.

"We need to tell agriculture's story as much as we can because people don't understand how difficult it is to get the food to them and that they depend on agriculture every day."

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Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.

Photo Caption: Marjorie Moesel telling Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture about a "pickle plant" at Septemberfest.

