

# Kill Deer, The Strawberry Farm

## Living Today

Thursday, February 1, 1979

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Kill Deer Farm, the home of Harold and Patsy Lineberger and their three children, is often referred to by area citizens as "the strawberry farm."

It is that and more.

The Linebergers operate a pick-your-own operation on 10 acres of their sprawling 115-acre fruit farm on Cherryville Rd., which also produces grapes and peaches, and which has won three top awards recently for the family's conservation efforts.

In a state where so many farms tell a conservation story, placing close second in the annual state competition for Conservation Farm Family of the Year is high praise and honors the family of five, as excellent conservationists and active church and community leaders. Previously, the family won the area award and were tapped Cleveland County's Conservation Farm Family by the Cleveland Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors.

Strawberries, that juicy red fruit so popular for desserts, salads, jams and preserves has played an important part in the lives of Harold and Patsy Lineberger and their children, Barry, a senior, at KMHS, Jeff, a sophomore at KMSHS, and Lee-Ann, a seventh grader at Cherryville Junior High where Patsy Lineberger teaches service occupations and careers.

"We used to grow strawberries on my father's farm in Dallas," said Harold, but we picked the berries ourselves for sale in the markets. I decided when I grew up I'd try to find a better way to do it, because we didn't have irrigation at home and became discouraged. Dry weather would literally ruin all our work."

Mr. Lineberger, a former 4-H extension agent in Anson County and for 13 years news editor for Rutherford Electric Co-op, started his own strawberry business with 1/4 of an acre in Cherryville, "because a little extra cash never hurt anybody."

Ten years ago the family built their four-bedroom home on Rt. 1 and applied for conservation plans with the Cleveland Soil and Water Conservation District to be used on his farm, which up until Jan. 1977 was for them a part-time job. "We invested money and developed the farm into what has become a full-time job," said Mrs. Lineberger, who assists her husband with pruning grapes and hoeing, along with their two sons. Lee-Ann is chief sales lady at peak seasons in April-May when hundreds of customers start before daylight picking strawberries. Lee-Ann enjoys seeing the carloads of people who take gallon boxes to the fields and pick as many as 1500 gallons in one day. The Linebergers offer their guests hot coffee and public restroom facilities.

"It's a busy time for all of us, from morning until dark," said Mrs. Lineberger, "but we love it and that's why we've become successful."

Mr. Lineberger agrees. He said his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Graham Lineberger of Gaston County, raised strawberries and other truck produce on a 32-acre farm to send their son and six other children through college. Lineberger is a 1960 graduate of N. C. State University.

Mrs. Lineberger, the former Patsy Eaker of Cherryville, is the daughter of Mrs. Cecil Eaker and grew up on a dairy farm in Gaston County. She has taught school for 16 years.

Patsy and Harold have lived on a farm all their lives except two years in Wadesboro when Lineberger was an extension agent.

The Linebergers are setting conservation examples with a conservation cropping system, managed grasslands, grassed waterways and terraces, among other things. Mr. Lineberger notes there are three things essential in growing strawberries, weed killers, mulching and irrigation. Mrs. Lineberger adds a fourth, "constant hoeing."

"We'd lose our crops without irrigation," said Mr. Lineberger, explaining that water, pumped from a pond below the woods, is sprinkled over one and one-half acres at a time. The pump is turned on every three days or so when it doesn't rain and the berries are watered for about three hours. He is in process of constructing another pond for a more dependable water supply since the crops have been expanded. He is also in process of building a cold storage room to keep the fruits in.

Fruit farming is expensive business and requires planning to succeed. Gasoline to run their irrigation pump is the most expensive item, according to Lineberger, who estimates that cost in winter is about \$50 a night to keep the frost off. He estimates that a good crop will produce 1600-2000 gallons an acre.

"With irrigation a farmer can cover some of his bets and doesn't lose it all," says Lineberger, who said that the addition of a backup pump to his irrigation system has paid off.

Mr. Lineberger credits the family's success to the fact that all of them work together. "Everybody helps," he says. "We're a team."

Three of the five members of the family like to cook. Harold Lineberger rises at 5 a. m. every day and prepares a big breakfast for the whole family before they go off to school. Barry Lineberger drives a school bus. Both Barry and Jeff Lineberger are active in school activities. Jeff is president of the Science Club and FFA. Lee-Ann plays clarinet in the band at Cherryville Junior High and has taken up her brother's love for

cooking, decorating and crafts. Lee-Ann prepares lunch for the family during busy seasons and does all the housework in summer months for her mother to help on the farm. The Linebergers are active in Resurrection Lutheran Church.

Strawberry farming is a continual "setting out, spraying and hoeing process all year round" and all the Linebergers advise that "you have to love it because it's work." Mrs. Lineberger admits that "it isn't really work to Harold and me because we love it so and can see the results our family is accomplishing."

Where did the family get the name of their farm? Kill Deers are birds which build their nests in strawberry patches. And since strawberries are the main crop, Harold and Patsy named their farm, "Kill Deer."

Do the Linebergers like to eat strawberries after all the work in growing and harvesting the fruit? "You bet we do," smiles Lee-Ann, who says that strawberries are frozen during the spring and summer months and are enjoyed year-round for special breakfasts, lunch and supper.

"Strawberry milkshakes are a favorite of her brothers at any time during the year and nothing is better than strawberry jam from the freezer in the cold, winter months of February."

(Turn To Page 8B)



**RUNNER-UP CONSERVATION FARM FAMILY IN N. C.** — The Harold Lineberger family on Route 1 are runners-up to North Carolina's Conservation Farm Family of the Year, nominated one year after they began their "pick it yourself" strawberry operation on

full-time basis. The Linebergers are pictured with daughter, Lee-Ann, with the plaques the family has earned. Not pictured are Barry and Jeff Lineberger, who were participating in high school events when the pictures were made.



Photos by Tom McIntyre

**STRAWBERRY FARM** — Kill Deer farm on Cherryville Rd. is the home of Harold and Patsy Lineberger and three children who operate a "pick it

yourself" strawberry farm which has been honored for top conservation efforts recently in the county and state.



**STRAWBERRIES ARE FAVORITE DISHES** — Lee-Ann Lineberger and her mother, Patsy Lineberger, enjoy preparing yummy dishes for the family to enjoy from the strawberries the family harvests on their 115-acre fruit farm on Rt. 1. Frozen strawberry jam is a favorite breakfast treat for the family of five.



**SHOWS OFF IRRIGATION SYSTEM** — A program of irrigation is very important to a fruit farmer and

Harold Lineberger is quite proud of his efforts on "Kill Deer Farm." Strawberries are the main crop.