



Barry and Gail Eckardt have been married a year without a single fight.

## TO LOVE, HONOR, CHERISH . . . AND MILK COWS

# Love Found In Classifieds

By Jane Fyksen

DEARBROOK, WIS. — To love, honor, cherish — and milk cows twice a day.

Not typical wedding vows, but Barry and Gail Eckardt's courtship was offbeat, too. They were not high school sweethearts; nor were they introduced by a mutual friend. Barry never hustled Gail in a single's bar, but neither did their eyes meet at a church social, either.

Instead, it was an ad appearing in *Agri-View's* Aug. 22, 1980 classified section that brought them together. Searching through *Agri-View* (published in Marshfield, Wis.) for used tractors for her husband to repair and resell, Gail's mom spied Barry's ad. Since she wasn't overly fond of Gail's boyfriend at the time, Helen Richer clipped the ad and urged her daughter to answer it.

After carrying the scrap of paper in her wallet for over a month, Gail finally worked up nerve enough to write. One thing led to another. The two celebrated their first wedding anniversary last Valentine's Day.

"I figured someone who would be so desperate to write an ad for a wife would be kind of weird," Gail says, smiling at Barry. "Mom didn't like the guy I was going with so she was always circling those ads in the *Globe* and the *National Enquirer*."

"Mom said I'd at least have a good pen pal out of it," the 22-year-old farmwife recalls. "The wife part didn't sink in. The loneliness just got to me, and I wanted to have a good friend to write to."

Barry had different ideas.

"My folks were building a new house over a period of four years, and I knew that pretty soon they were going to be moving out," reports Barry, 30. "I thought I'd better get on

### personals

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**It all started with this classified ad in *Agri-View*, published in Marshfield, Wis.**

the ball and find a girl to live on the farm. Living with my folks so long, I held off getting married. I had it too easy. I was spoiled.

The ad ran one week and drummed up three responses for Barry, who had just bought his parents' farm in Langlade County. Actually, the dairyman was disappointed.

"I thought I'd get quite a few," he reveals. "I thought there must be a lot of girls in the same boat I was."

Barry went to see one of the prospects, but that relationship didn't pan out. A second girl he considered too "wishy-washy," so he gave her name and address to a buddy. The third reply was Gail's.

Barry received her two-page letter dated Sept. 12, 1980, in which she told about the 40-acre farm she grew up on near Pittsville, her hobbies and her physical statistics.

"P.S.," she wrote. "I realize that this is about the time you'll be baling hay and such, so I won't be expecting to hear from you right away, if at all."

Interested, Barry immediately wrote back to Gail, who at the time was a ward clerk at a hospital in Tomah, Wis.

"I'm in good health and I don't smoke," he revealed in the letter, along with telling her about the 200-acre farm. "P.S. It's too wet to make hay."

**Editor's Note:** Most of what goes into *Ag World* stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of *FARM SHOW* touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching — everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.

If you've read or heard a good *Ag World* type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: *FARM SHOW*, Box 704, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.

Their first date went anything but smoothly. Trying to impress him with a chicken dinner, Gail served the dairyman margarine. But Barry remembers, "I liked what I saw."

On the other hand, Gail admits that it "wasn't love at first sight." "I thought he was awfully pushy," she remembers. "He mentioned marriage the first time I saw him."

Three weeks after their first date, Gail started thinking seriously about Barry. "I came up here to meet him and go deer hunting," she remarks. "I brought my gun, but we didn't go hunting."

In mid-December Barry proposed, suggesting they get married in two weeks. He wanted to set the wedding for Dec. 31, the date his parents were married.

But Gail wasn't going to be rushed. Although she now loved him, she wanted to wait.

The couple tied the knot on Feb. 14, 1981. Since they had only dated a few months, friends were leery about the newlyweds' future.

"We've made it a year. No one thought we would," Gail points out. "My friends told me not to let him push me into something. They thought he wanted to use me as a housewife and slave in the barn, not someone to love and as a companion. I know the farm work goes hand in hand, but I realized that companionship is what he wanted."

"I expected that she was going to have to help me, but I didn't think she'd do as much as she is doing. She can do just about everything around here," Barry says proudly. "After we were married a month, Dad quit coming to help me milk."

"That's where we do all our serious talking — out in the barn," Gail says.

"That and goofing off," Barry adds. "You know we've never had a fight?"

"We figured that we were both mature enough for marriage, and we said it was going to work no matter what problems would arise," Gail insists.

"We just think positive," her partner agrees.

Their eight-year age difference isn't a problem, either.

Thus, the Eckardts have settled into married life. They want to have their farm completely paid for within eight years. Plus, they plan to build a log home. Barry and Gail also want two children.

While planning to raise a family, they're thinking about cutting the number of cows they milk. Voted the outstanding young farm couple in Langlade County last year by the Farm Bureau, the Eckardts figure, "Why work so hard?" Barry feels he can make more money in a year than dairymen milking 100 cows who are constantly buying new equipment. He's a "do-it-yourselfer."

"I don't have to buy fancy stuff. I use my head a little," he explains. "I bought a silo that was 20 miles away for \$2,500. I tore it down and rebuilt it. I stuck \$5,500 into it and it's like a brand new, \$15,000 silo. How many guys will do that?" In addition, he built an elevator system for the barn, throw racks and a workshop.

Gail keeps busy with sewing, needlepoint and cross-country skiing.

"I learned how to can and grow a garden. I really enjoyed it," she says. "This (marriage) is something I kind of dreamed of but never thought would happen. I love being home every day. I figured I'd be working Monday through Friday for the rest of my life. I never thought I'd be a dairy farmer's wife."

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