

## PROMOTER OF THE YEAR winner

What began as a third-grade classroom visit to talk about raising pigs has turned into an 18-year-old tradition for Vicky Singlestad.

Singlestad and husband Scott brought a young piglet and shared interesting information about their Waseca County farrow-to-finish swine operation with their daughter Michelle's classmates in 1991. Michelle is now married and a physical education teacher in Anchorage, Alaska, and Singlestad grew the agricultural education program into an annual event that also includes dairy, sheep and crop producers.

The Waseca school district's Ag in the Classroom program, which Singlestad enthusiastically continues to organize each spring, has reached an estimated 2,800 school children. The students rotate between classrooms to hear four, 30-minute presentations about Minnesota livestock and crop production.

Singlestad's willingness to talk about the family's swine and crop farm and to encourage cooperation between commodity groups are reasons she is the Minnesota Pork Industry's 2010 Pork Promoter of the Year.

**Pork Promoter  
of the Year:  
Vicky Singlestad**

"I am always teaching somebody about what I do on the farm," she said. "I am not a farm wife – I am a farmer. It gives me a good feeling to tell people about what we do on the farm."

Singlestad says change in the student population has meant updating her agricultural messages to assure they are relevant to the audience. In comparison to her first classroom visit, there are now very few students who live on farms. Singlestad talks about what they do on their farm, plus how the commodities farmers raise eventually become consumer goods on grocery store shelves.

"Usually three or four kids were from a farm," she said. "Now we don't even ask that question because hardly anyone grows up on a farm, so we explain how their food got to the grocery store from a farm."

The questions that third graders ask about pigs and their enjoyment in touching a live farm animal, however, hasn't changed. There is always excitement when Singlestad brings the sleepy, three-day-old piglets out of a box for viewing and there are always inquiries on what they eat, what they weigh and how fast they grow.

To better illustrate and reinforce their talk, the Singlestads take the students on a virtual tour of their swine barns via seven-minute video. The youngsters can see and hear the sows, piglets and finishing hogs, and they can learn about practices such as ear tags, swine diets and feeding procedures.

In cooperation with other county commodity groups and the county Farm Bureau, Singlestad helped facilitate distribution of agricultural-related books to area schools. She works closely with another Waseca County pork producer and Farm Bureau member, Kim Balfe, who wrote a grant to assist with book purchases. The book



**Vicky Singlestad talks about raising pigs to third graders.**



**A piglet from the Singlestad farm is part of Vicky's Ag in the Classroom presentation.**



**Pork Promoter of the Year, Vicky Singlestad, has reached 2,800 elementary students with her agricultural messages.**

bundles include a dozen publications on various livestock species, crops and forestry.

Singlestad is also involved in other successful educational events.. At the yearly Farm Bureau-sponsored food checkout day, area farmers serve breakfast at the Waseca HyVee grocery store. The cost consumers pay for breakfast is the actual percentage that farmers receive for the raw product. The nutritional, low-cost breakfast is a surprising, eye-opener for many who attend. She also volunteers her time working at either the soybean growers' or Farm Bureau booths at the annual Taste of the Farm Event, which is hosted on an area dairy farm in June.

"It is another way to have people come out to the country and see a farm," she said.

Singlestad is on the board of directors for the Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation, a private organization whose mission is to secure funding for statewide agricultural literacy programs and material. The Agriculture in the Classroom program is administered through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and two of its most popular elementary publications are Ag Mag and Ag Mag Junior.

Singlestad together with Balfe also represent agricultural interests at Waseca Agribusiness Chamber meetings. She is a member for the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council's Education and Leadership committee and the Minnesota Farm Bureau Promotion and Education committee, volunteers at the Minnesota State Fair Oink Booth and Little Farmhand interactive exhibit, and works at the FFA Barnyard swine display during the Waseca County Fair.

Her newest educational undertaking is through the Minnesota Farm Bureau's Ag Pen Pal Program. Singlestad is just beginning regular e-mail correspondence with a first-grade class in Anchorage, Alaska. She provides written and photo updates on activities taking place in the swine barns, and once field work begins, she will write about that too.

The Singlestad family also includes daughter Kristy, who is majoring in dietetics and exercise science at Concordia College, Moorhead, and son Michael, a district soil conservation service technician in Red Lake Falls. Singlestad grew up on a dairy farm near Arlington and met Scott while attending the University of Minnesota, Waseca.

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