

Remembering LeAnn Harner



LeAnn Mary Harner (Simon) was born in Gettysburg, SD December 14, 1959.

She was raised on the family farm and registered Hereford ranch near Lebanon, SD, and attended a small country school and Gettysburg High School where she graduated in 1977. By then she was highly involved in agriculture and leadership through 4-H, FFA, and the National Junior Hereford Association.

From there she enrolled in the AgEd program at South Dakota State University where she fulfilled several roles as officer in the State FFA and the National Junior Hereford Association. These roles led her to travel the state and nation extensively.

While at SDSU she met her future husband, Stuart Harner of Pierre, SD, in 1979. Their hearts were bonded almost immediately. After graduation in 1981 LeAnn became the VoAg teacher at Medina, ND. Stuart followed her to North Dakota, finding employment in Jamestown. They were married December 31, 1981. A New Year's Eve wedding was an anniversary neither one ever forgot.

Life took the couple back to Pierre where they built their first house and LeAnn worked for several organizations as manager or director. While working for the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts she was thrown into lobbying at the legislature. It was this role that helped shape the rest of her professional life. Eventually she opened and ran her own business in Pierre, primarily lobbying for clients.

When Stuart was offered a career-changing opportunity in Bloomington, MN, LeAnn stepped up once again and found jobs working for organizations in Minneapolis. This was where she really honed her management skills. She continued her career path when Stuart's job gave them the opportunity to move back to the prairie and live in Bismarck, ND.

Through all of this "city living," LeAnn never lost her farm life core. Not having land for crops or cows, LeAnn's 4-H and FFA roots led to raising and showing registered cats. This passion became much easier while based in Minnesota, which led to traveling all over the upper Midwest showing cats and winning championships while developing pedigree lines that were in demand. Eventually she trained for and became an American Cat Fanciers Association licensed All Breed Cat Show Judge. Her need for registered livestock was at least partially filled.

LeAnn may have been living "off the farm" but as they say, "you can never take the farm out of the girl." City life couldn't satisfy those deep roots, so they found a small piece of rural property in Oliver County, ND. By then LeAnn was a well-established ND lobbyist so was able to start and run her own business from home, where yard work and gardening fed her farm girl soul. She then ran for and was, elected to the Oliver County Soil Conservation District board of directors, a role she cherished for 12 years.



Diving deep into the conservation and self-sufficient lifestyle only served to grow her roots deeper into the sandy loam where she and everything she touched thrived. With Stuart as her chief mechanic and number one hired hand, the two of them built quite the little farmstead.



By 2002 LeAnn had added Exotic Guinea Fowl and chickens to the farm. Eventually looking at all the grass on the place that was just being mowed down and all the milk she was buying for Stuart at the store, LeAnn started looking for alternatives. She decided on dairy goats.

The first goat was an older doe already in milk. Before Stuart could get the first facilities built, there was a second doe to keep the first one from being lonely. Then it was off to the races! More goats, baby goats, chores, plans, facilities, pedigrees, Oh My! She hand-milked her does twice a day for more than 15 years. This was her happy place as Stuart often heard her singing to herself while milking or making cheese.

The farm girl was at her peak showing goats and living her conservation and self-sufficient lifestyle beliefs. Even with only two acres of pasture, she had Stuart build portable grazing panels that she moved twice a day whenever the grass was growing, embracing the soil conservation strategy of rotational grazing. In a good year LeAnn would have over 150 rotations, improving the soil each year. Then she discovered milk testing, which gave her new goals to strive for.

LeAnn started and ran the Dakota Goat Association where she was determined to gather and spread knowledge and the love of the farm life to any and all. Always the teacher, she introduced many people to showmanship, cheese and soap making as well as giving formal classes. LeAnn didn't teach by memorization nor indoctrination – she used inspiration to encourage her students to want to learn and become better. She was a mentor to many new goat owners and gave classes on how to do milk testing for their herds and for others.



Retaining her career of lobbying, her skills became instrumental in passage of the Cottage Food law and then the Raw Milk Sales law in North Dakota. She promoted consumer choice in health and food freedom everywhere she went. LeAnn was well-known and respected at the State Capitol for her honesty, integrity, and never backing down when defending something she believed in.

Through all of her busy farm life LeAnn continued to be active in all her hobbies. She taught herself how to quilt and knit, read hundreds of books each year, and authored dozens of articles for newsletters and social media. She did all of this while maintaining their home as a sanctuary for herself and Stuart.

Adhering to her most precious of beliefs, LeAnn refused to be the reason any land was taken out of production. Instead, she instructed that her ashes be spread on the ground that she so loved. In the spring when the grass is once again green and growing, LeAnn's ashes will be spread on the pastures and garden, her very last act enhancing soil quality in Oliver County.

On the 365th day of her 44th year of marriage the Lord took her from the pain of cancer, peacefully in her sleep at the one place she most loved: home. Heaven rejoiced, but the world was lessened.

Until we meet again.

