

# City girl flourishes on her husband's family farm

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FORT WAYNE, Ind. — Self-described city girl Pat Wyss had a lot to learn about farming and the country life when she started dating her eventual husband in high school. Even her future mother-in-law thought so.

"I'd never set foot on a real working farm until I met Andy's mom and dad," Wyss said. "I had this storybook idea of how things were. His mother was concerned I wouldn't make it on the farm. I'm a city girl."

More than 30 years later, Pat is office manager for Wyss Farms Enterprises, located in southern Allen County. Pat and Andy, both 54, own 260 acres and operate a total of 2,000. They grow corn, soybeans and some wheat.

Pat has been office manager since 2002, when Andy's brother Tom left the business started by the men's father in 1948.

"I find the business of farming very exciting. It's fun and very challenging," she said. "There's always something to engage your mind."

"I stand behind my husband and promote him and what he does. We make a good team."

Wyss has a master's degree in education from Indiana University, and has taught fifth grade for the past 22 years. "I very much love that job," she said. "It plays out very well. The principal is very good to work for."

Wyss found her niche in accounting, finance and marketing after her attempt at hands-on farming didn't go smoothly. "I was out doing fieldwork and hooked the hoe on the fence," she said, with a laugh.

In 1983, she took a marketing class and learned to chart and read market signs.

"In those days, you charted the highs and lows on graph paper," she said. "My sister-in-law encouraged me to put the records and information onto the computer."

"My first teacher was my daughter Amy. She would sit next to me and we'd input records. I also took computer classes because I wanted to become knowledgeable in computers and farm software programs."

Pat and Andy's four children — Don, 32, Amy, 30, Molly, 29, and Joe, 25 — all participate in running the family business, though Don is the only one actively involved in farming with their parents.

"We utilize the God-given talents each one has," Wyss said. "Each of them has been involved since they were old enough to carry a feed bucket."

Don, also a grain merchandiser with Bunge North America in Decatur, Ind., is a partner in the farm. Amy, who graduated from the University of Notre Dame, lives



**PAT WYSS** stands in the cab of the Case IH 2388 combine she and her husband, Andy, purchased, though she doesn't have much chance to drive it. Wyss and some of their children have found a niche in the financial side of farming, while other family members prefer fieldwork and planning. (Michele F. Mihaljevich photo)

in Chicago and serves as a financial consultant to the farm.

Molly, a registered nurse in Indianapolis, does advertising and promotional marketing. Joe, who also graduated from Notre Dame, is a financial consultant in Chicago and a strategic planner for the farm.

The family is in the midst of estate planning and developing a Limited Liability Company (LLC) that will involve all the kids, Wyss said.

"We rely on our kids a lot," she said. "We have a close-knit family."

The entire family's involvement in the farm solidified about the same time things were changing because of Andy's brother's departure from the operation. They entered a family business planning contest at Notre Dame, and worked on the 32-page plan together.

"Andy said to them, 'Who wants to be involved?' and they all did," Wyss said. "We were going through a transition. Fate came knocking on our door, and we seized the opportunity."

The Wyss family won the contest and the \$7,000 in

prize money, but Wyss said what they learned about the farm and each other was a bigger prize.

"Our children are a blessing to us," she said. "We gave them a lot of responsibility from day one. They've all found a way to be involved."

The Wyss family has always used Case IH equipment on the farm, she said.

"Mike Smith, our salesman with Koenig Equipment in Huntington, is always friendly and helpful," Wyss said. "When it comes time to buy a new piece of equipment, he presents what they have, and is great to work with."

Wyss said she is proud to be a farmer and hopes other farmers realize how important it is to treat what they do as a business.

"Farmers that will survive are those who treat their entity like a business," she said. "I have a love and excitement for business. We also spend a lot of time marketing our business, and a lot of farmers don't do that."

"Farming is an honorable profession," she said. "You'll never be out of a job."