

**Introduction of Vincent & Christine Maefsky for Induction into
the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Hall of Fame, March 17th, 2016**

I am honored to introduce our great friends, Vincent and Christine Maefsky, for their induction into the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Hall of Fame. In my opinion, none have achieved more, contributed more, or have set a better example for dairy goat breeders across the country, let alone Minnesota. So, I hope here to provide a bit of context to their story.

My wife, Mary, and I first met Vince and Christine in 1971 at a meeting to re-organize the Minnesota Dairy Goat Association and awake it from a long sleep. The social movements of the 60's were well underway, and dairy goats had caught the attention of an assortment of folks caught up in the latest re-incarnation of the back-to-the-land movement and here assembled were back-to-the-landers, communalists, free-thinkers, and those who simply appreciated goats and were daring to be different. Now, it would be presumptuous to say that Vince and Christine should be categorized into any one of these groups; however one could say they were highly sympathetic to all of them and I must note that they brought their first goat home in the back of a Volkswagen, and a Volkswagen Karmann Ghia, at that.

Though they both are natives of New York City, Vince's family moved to Oklahoma for his father's occupation with a large airline, and as Vince grew up in his Catholic family, he chose to attend the Seminary, primarily interested in philosophy, which generally isn't considered a particularly valuable prerequisite for a career in goat farming. Christine came to Oklahoma to pursue her university degree in political science. The fact that they met there may have had something to do with Vincent leaving the Seminary. After all, these were the late 60's and they were mutually idealistic and activist. So, true to their ideals, together they moved back to New York, got married, and began to work for the amazing Dorothy Day in the Catholic Workers Movement helping the destitute in New York City. And, in her spare time, Christine finished her Master's Degree in Elementary Curriculum and Instruction at Columbia University. Oh, the stories they can tell about their time there.

Later, to carry out one of the ideas in the vision of the Catholic Worker Movement, they moved back to Oklahoma and then to Kansas to help establish an agricultural community, with a group of like-minded individuals, at least one of which had a Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. However, once again, following their conscience, Vince and Christine found themselves moving to Minnesota with goats in tow, where Christine pursued her teaching career and Vince worked as an orderly at the University of Minnesota Hospital achieving special skills in urological administration. Their interest in agriculture

persisted as they established themselves in Wyoming, Minnesota, again with a group of others interested in gardening, chickens, and goats to sustain themselves.

Christine continued teaching and after Vince's work at the U of M Hospital, he once again followed his ideals to a new career. As a man of high principal, he became...a REALTOR, and a successful one at that, at least by his own accounts. Eventually this led them to a connection with an old farmstead in Washington County, near Scandia, which they were able to purchase as a place for a few goats, a few chickens, and a big garden for themselves and their growing family. As time passed and the goat numbers grew, they came to realize that more goat dollars were flowing out than flowing in, and that if they were to have goats, which they so enjoyed, they would have to make them profitable. So with all the determination, grit, sacrifice, and skill that they possessed and that all livestock breeders understand, they began to build the beautiful and productive Poplar Hill Dairy Goat Farm starting in 1972, today a Mecca for so many both in and out of the dairy goat world.

There had been and were at that time a few large goat dairies in the United States, mostly selling fluid goat milk to major metropolitan markets. But there was nothing like the diverse and fast-growing industry of today, which includes fluid milk, and a wide variety of cheeses, yogurt, kefir, soaps, lotions, & confections. Vince and Christine have been at the forefront of that expansion, leading the charge. Today they have a highly integrated operation. They not only milk about 350 goats and maintain a herd of nearly 700, they also raise in rotation their own alfalfa, oats, corn, and beans from 200 acres of cropland that includes their own 120 acres, all in the heart of an area where the demand for small parcels for country living homes has wiped out almost all other farms.

When they started, there was no one waiting to buy and pick up their milk, so they convinced a processor to work with them. They created their own Poplar Hill Farm brand of fluid milk, designed their own label, and hauled their own milk to the creamery. Once packaged, they distributed it to the retailers they had recruited, and did their own promotions for goat's milk. As they grew, they helped to re-establish the Bass Lake creamery in Wisconsin, which then went on to produce goat's milk cheese under the Poplar Hill label. Even as they have scaled up considerably since those early days, all of those same elements are part of their operation today.

There is more than a little bit of the underdog complex that comes with raising dairy goats, because in working with the animals you soon realize how personable, engaging, and useful they are, despite the broader public notion of goats as troublesome consumers of tin cans and laundry. For the true dairy goat enthusiast, this builds a sense of determination, independence, cantankerousness, and a toughness that I prefer to call Maefskyness, because along with fighting perceptions, there are many

technical questions involving the development of a goat dairy, which have no ready solution. For example, dairy goats are largely seasonal breeders, peaking in production in spring and early summer and tailing off rapidly in the fall and winter. So providing a year-round milk supply for the market is a problem. They developed and refined a system of artificial lights to manipulate breeding cycles for part of their herd thus ensuring a more uniform milk supply through the year. There are so many more examples. They may not agree, but I have to believe that Vince and Christine's inventive and resourceful natures actually enjoyed those challenges and as they look back, they can only be proud of how they met every one of them.

As livestock breeders they have maintained a herd of American Dairy Goat Association registered dairy goats, primarily Alpines, Toggenburgs, Saanens, and Nubians for 45 years. They were awarded lifetime membership in ADGA and have registered almost 5,000 dairy goats, the second largest number in the history of the Association. They have been on continuous DHIR testing since 1973 and have produced numerous National Top Ten Dairy Goats in production, protein, and fat, including one Alpine doe that was National Alpine Breed Leader in production. Their breeding programs have produced many Grand Champions in each breed and they have sold their stock to nearly every state in the Union and to 14 nations abroad. Vince is notorious for his meticulous record-keeping. He literally wrote the book on this, which will soon appear in a larger volume on dairy goat management to be published by Langston University in Oklahoma. As many of us in Minnesota recognize, one of Vince's favorite sayings is, "It's in the book!"

The Maefsky family helped establish the first Washington County Fair Dairy Goat Show in 1975 and according to the record I received, they have continuously shown there since that time. Apparently they've taken a little break from that to be here today. Kidding aside, as we say in the goat world, they also helped establish the first Minnesota State Fair Dairy Goat Show in 1980 and have shown there every year since, one of just three families that have done so. This is a marquee event for promoting dairy goats and they not only exhibit there, but also greet the public and promote dairy products with their fine displays.

For many years, Vince served as the Master of Ceremonies at the After-Show Dinner. Many are unaware of his wicked sense of humor, but those who attended the dinners met a variety of characters introduced and played by Vince. There was the all-knowing Professor Saanen Sensible, who provided many laughs with his off-beat dairy goat management tips, such as the seven ways to determine if a goat has died, an example being MM or Minimal Motion, where you approach the body of the suspiciously motionless goat, draw a chalk line around it, then return 24 hours later to see if anything

moved. And there was Oberhasli Karate, Miss Toggenburg the Titillating, Alpine the Agile, and others, all providing some humorous dairy goat advice to questions from the audience. One of my favorites was a magician complete with cape and wand who dazzled the audience with bogus magic tricks, silliness to be sure, but a great tension-breaker for all of us, who have just gone toe to toe in competition and this also brought a greater cohesiveness to exhibitors and members of MDGA that I believe propelled them to work together to promote the goat, provide education, and carry out youth activities throughout the year.

As for education, this has been a passion for Christine & Vince. There is a mighty list of things they have done to educate and help others. All of their four children were active in 4-H. Christine served as the Mariner's Club 4-H Dairy Goat Project leader for 15 years and received the Award of the Pearl Clover for her service. Two of their children were in FFA. Christine taught for 31 years in the Minneapolis Public Schools where, for many years she involved her elementary school students in overnight camping experiences at the farm. It's a pretty safe bet that there are more MPS graduates who have milked a goat than have ever milked a cow.

Since the early 80's, they have worked with the U of M's Veterinary College to help train students. I've always been suspicious that they might be getting free veterinary care. They work with Globe College, Argosy University, and the Minnesota School of Business. They provide tours and hands-on lab sessions for those interested in animal agriculture. They've worked with Heifer International and have hosted 33 international Ag trainees from 19 countries. They've hosted many MDGA general membership meetings at their farm, hosted farmstead cheese-making clinics, AI clinics, and two ADGA Judges Training Conferences. Christine edited the MDGA Newsletter and is currently Historian for MDGA.

Vince has been a Director on that Board and was instrumental in initiating and organizing the Annual MDGA Fall Dairy Goat Conference at the University of Minnesota. He has lectured nationally and internationally. With Heifer International, he and DVM David Sherman (co-author the bible on veterinary care for goats, the book *Dairy Goat Medicine*), travelled and lectured for 3 weeks in Szechuan Province, China, where Vince's new favorite word became...Gombei! Incidentally, on the cover of that terrific reference book is a picture of Poplar Hill Dairy Goat Farm. And by the way, as a valuable skill to have in the business of farming, Vince is an expert blackjack player and both he and Christine play a mean brand of poker, as can be attested to by the fact that they enjoy the sport and still own the farm. Vince's only failure in education has been in trying to teach me to play blackjack.

When it comes to service, I look at their accomplishments and I am overwhelmed. Schools groups, senior citizen groups, girl scout troops, boy scout troops, 4-H clubs, home-school groups, the Humane Society camps all have visited...with over 70 tours in 2014 alone. That's the last figure I have, so I think they've lost count since then. There is the Honorary FFA Chapter Degree, Washington County Farm Family of Year Award, the MDGA Award of Merit for Outstanding Service. Vincent served as a County DHIA Board Member, on the U of M Veterinary College Advisory Council and as a Diagnostic Lab Advisory Council member.

Christine was the Washington County ADGA Show Secretary, is presently the Scandia Planning Commission Chair, was on the Scandia Comprehensive Plan Committee and Capital Improvements Committee, Chair of Scandia's Committee to Retain and Encourage Agriculture, Chair of Scandia's Priority Scenic Viewsheds Committee and Chair of the Log House Landing (on the St. Croix River) Advisory Committee. For 11 years she was Minnesota State Director of Evaluation, International Future Problem Solving Program for K-12, a Governing Board Member of the International Future Problem Solving Program out of Ann Arbor, a Member and past Chair for the Advisory Board of Success Beyond the Classroom (a metro area student project encouraging young authors & inventors in creativity and future cities thinking. This all makes me feel quite inadequate and very tired.

But to fully understand their contribution, you would need to visit Poplar Hill, a fully functioning farm, decked out like a beautiful arboretum, everything neatly trimmed, everything in its place, on time and on budget. Their efforts, their dedication, their attention to detail and organization, to planning and efficiency, to making use of every opportunity and creating their own opportunities have been a long-standing, positive model, not only for those who raise dairy goats, but to anyone who appreciates livestock and the contributions they make to our lives. I believe that their beginnings with just a few goats, helped them understand, connect, and appreciate the true nature and value of that species in a way that every accomplished livestock breeder can relate to. It is said that, "the eye of the stockman, fattens the calf," but I also believe, "the eye of the breeder, determines the path forward." The Maefskys certainly have led us all forward. They are the philosopher with the hands of a farmer and the educator with the heart of a Catholic Worker, together who understand the value of being connected to the land and the animals with which we share it. It is my distinct honor to introduce my dear friends, Vincent and Christine Maefsky.

---Doug Thompson