

Biography – Denise M. Johnson lives on an acre in Upper Arlington with her husband Bill.

Raised in a suburb of Cleveland, in what today is considered a food desert, agriculture was not part of Denise's early years. Her interest in agriculture began when she married Bill. Together they planted fruit trees, cultivated a large garden, and sold basil, herbs, tomatoes and rhubarb to local restaurants.

Denise used her degree in journalism from Ohio University to work in public relations and marketing for Red Roof Inns Corporation. During this time, she was an advisor for the Ohio University public relations students. She earned her accreditation from the Public Relations Society of America and coached other professions to prepare for the accreditation exam.

In 1984 her passion for helping others lead her to teach English as a second language in Chongqing, China and to travel around the world. Visiting agricultural production in developing countries in the early 1980's was eye-opening, humbling, and fascinating. This experience impacted her perspective on the true essentials of life.

Bill and Denise started their family in 1985, and she became a freelance writer for local magazines. With the birth of their second daughter, Denise became a full-time stay-at-home Mom; this was the onset of a 20-year adventure with their three children Kate, Laura and Billy.

Kate joining a 4-H livestock club in 1994, was the beginning of Denise's involvement with Farm Bureau and started a new chapter for the family in agriculture. Kate's initiated her 4-H career with a rabbit project and it was necessary to travel to other counties to gain knowledge and expertise in rabbit showmanship and breeding. Denise became Franklin county's rabbit specialist and organized workshops and seminars to share the knowledge they learned. During the county fair each year, the Johnsons would help and tutor all exhibitors to prepare for the show. Rabbits were only the starting point, the family took sheep, poultry and swine projects as well as other non-livestock projects. The Johnsons also competed in youth and open livestock classes at the Ohio State Fair for 10 years as well as national competitions. Denise served as a 4-H advisor as well as a member of the Franklin County 4-H Advisory Committee.

As a new member Franklin County Farm Bureau, Denise assisted with the county fair *Country Olympics* and enjoyed learning more about FB with the Southwest Early Riser Council. Soon Denise was helping with the FB Membership Committee and eventually co-chairing it for 2 years. Bill was serving on the Franklin County Board, and both were involved with Farm Tours, Candidates' Night and other activities that helped introduce the general public to agriculture and where their food originated—and the people who produced it.

In 2005 Denise was hired by the Ohio 4-H Foundation at The Ohio State University. She worked closely with Ohio and Franklin County Farm Bureau on projects, committees, and boards. Working with 4-H expanded Denise's knowledge and passion for agriculture and the concerns and challenges of the farming community and its youth,

Joining the Department of Horticulture and Crop Science as the Program Assistant for the OSU Nursery Short Course, informed Denise on the demands and opportunities of the horticulture industry. In this position, Denise worked

with graduate students, organized state-wide horticulture class tours, scheduled over 100 educational classes for horticulture industry professionals, negotiated contracts and managed the event. Denise especially enjoyed encouraging students during tough times so they could achieve their best work. She was an advisor for Pi Alpha Xi student club and hosted student dinners at her home. Denise often had foreign students join them for holidays and enjoyed helping them adjust to living in America.

This position led to Denise's best job ever - - Program Manager for the Master Gardener Volunteer Program (MGV) for Ohio State University Extension and working with MGV Director Pamela Bennett. Denise helped manage the online Extension service *Ask a Master Gardner Volunteer*, recruiting and training MGVs from around the state to respond to gardening questions. Within four years, the online service was responding to over 80 percent of the gardening questions, freeing up extension educators' time. Working with MGV county coordinators, developing solutions to issues, organizing meetings and workshops and working with amazing volunteers from throughout the state was exhilarating. Accelerating donations of fresh produce to food banks and making MGVs more aware of food deserts was the result of the *Grow Ohio* contest Denise initiated. MGVs food donations continue to increase today. Most memorable was partnering with the Tandana Foundation to travel eight times to Ecuador providing a unique service-learning opportunity for MGVs to work with indigenous communities in agriculture and horticulture projects.

During this time, Denise served on the Franklin County FB Board adding a different agricultural viewpoint for the county. As an active beekeeper and extension employee, she could offer a non-traditional perspective. Denise co-chaired the *Breakfast on the Farm* event, worked on the membership committee, represented FB at the *Franklin Park Conservatory Farm to Table* event, participated in county fair activities, attended policy luncheons, candidate night events, several FB state meetings and served as the committee chair for the scholarship committee. Denise enjoyed participating in board meetings and jumped in wherever help was needed.

Traveling to Washington D.C. to meet with legislators to discuss farmers' needs and to encourage legislation to benefit agriculture was an amazing opportunity and one of the highlights of Denise's many years on the board. This trip fostered an interest in public policy and Denise earned her Master's in Public Administration from the John Glenn School of Public Policy, OSU.

She recently retired from OSU but continues to volunteer with Extension as a MGV. She enjoys gardening, travelling, volunteering, and spending time with her husband, children, and grandchildren.

Her passion for agriculture is evident as the next generation continues to define their role in agriculture. Kate and her husband live on a fourth-generation family farm and started a maple syrup operation and other on farm businesses; Laura lives in the Northern Ireland countryside and is a Climate Resilience Consultant the World Bank and global NGOs on agricultural projects in Indonesia, the Philippines and across Africa; and Billy has developed an impressive garden at his home just outside of downtown Chicago. The future is bright as the grandchildren start 4-H and grandma helps with projects.

Although Denise was a latecomer to agriculture, her passion to convey the significant role agriculture and farmers play in our future and how good stewardship to precious farmland and natural resources is more urgent than ever.

Denise is extremely honored and humbled to be chosen as this year's Women in Ag honoree. She is grateful to God for the many blessing in her life. It was a privilege to serve on the Franklin County Farm Bureau Board. She appreciates the support and encouragement of her family and colleagues. She looks forward to teaching the next generation to be environmentally responsible citizens.