



Oral History of Illinois Agriculture

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- Abstract:** Manda Davis was born on December 10, 1981, in Clinton, Iowa. She grew up on her family's farm in Prophetstown, Illinois. Her brother started raising Columbia Sheep as a 4-H project. When she came of age, she took over her brother's sheep project and has since become a 4-H advisor for Columbia Sheep. In this capacity she attends 4-H meetings and helps youth plan and carry out livestock contests.
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Interview with Manda Davis

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Interview #1 August 14, 2008

Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco

- Davis: [unintelligible] [laughs] Right, trying to remember what MaryAnn was doing. [laughs] We're just going to talk.
- Maniscalco: She gave us the Ohio perspective.
- Cameraman: [unintelligible]
- Davis: Yeah, we don't usually get a lot of out of state people, so.
- Maniscalco: That's kinda interesting.
- Cameraman: Ready.
- Maniscalco: Ok Manda, so you just got showed Columbia sheep, can you tell us a little bit of the history about Columbia sheep?
- Davis: Well, umm, they originated in 1941 out in Wyoming. I don't know if it's the only, but it is one of the few, definitely, of the breeds that actually originated in the United States. It's a cross between two sheep that we will show later on in the week. The Rambouillet show tomorrow, and I think the Lincoln show tomorrow as well, also. So, this is the result of those selected mating and um, it's just developed since then, the national show has been held every year.
- Maniscalco: So what is kind of the keys to the Columbia breed? What are the kinds of things you look for in a Columbia?
- Davis: The Columbians are a dual purpose breed in that they are raise for both their meat and their wool. You get a lot of sheep that their meat is their strength and those are the sheep that are washed for shows and sheared completely to their skin for shows. Where Columbians aren't as they are also judged on their wool. So that is why you get that dirty look that a lot of people ask us about. 'Why are your sheep dirty' Well they're not dirty, that's how they are supposed to be shown. So they are a dual purpose breed. They have a medium fleece on them. Um, they are also known as the gentle white giants. Which is sometimes true, sometimes not, you get the different dispositions and personalities. But, they are known for their great mothering abilities also.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. Now, um, what is your involvement then with Columbia?
- Davis: My parents got sheep when I was two, decided to raise livestock, and that is what they decided to raise. Um, they started out with commercial sheep but then got into the Columbians. So I have around them since I was really little, grown up with them. Shown at lots of county fairs, at state level, national level. Then as I've gotten older I've gotten more involved with the National Association. Now I'm the Junior Advisor for the National Junior Association. So I work with youth across the county to develop their association, and develop their show each summer.
- Maniscalco: Wow, now um, I mean do you do a lot of traveling with this position? What exactly are your jobs, duties, and requirements?

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Davis: With the position?

Maniscalco: Yeah.

Davis: Um, really try to have the kids take leadership in their own show, or picking who they want for the judge, the awards. Then I help order everything, get everything situated and help run the show, but to give them as much control as possible, because they are leaders of the industry and our breed. And that's our future, and want to train them as best as possible, so they can be strong leaders as they get older.

Maniscalco: Great, very cool. Is there any else..?

Cameraman: Do we know where she is from?

Maniscalco: Yeah, can you tell us where you grew up and where you're from.

Davis: Um, my family farm is located in Morrison, Illinois. It's in the northwest part of Illinois. About twenty minutes from Iowa and an hour south of Wisconsin.

Maniscalco: Ok.

Cameraman: Can she describe the farm?

Maniscalco: Can you give us a description of what that farm is and is it mostly sheep is it—?

Davis: The only livestock we raise is sheep. We have about sixty-five Columbia brood ewes and then we also have about the same number of Southdown brood ewes. We have another breed that is one of those meat breeds. That's my brother's breed. I mean it's a family farm, but I kinda claim the Columbia, and he kinda claims the Southdowns, but we all work together. So we run a lot of sheep between those two breeds. And we raise hay to help lower the cost of feeding them. We have a seventeen acre farm, so not too big.

Maniscalco: So growing up on a farm, how was, what kind of childhood was that?

Davis: We learned so much about work and responsibility. That has to be the greatest part about growing up on a farm. That's what you will see from farm kids, they are hard workers. Because they've got to go out and do the chores, they have to do it in the winter when it's cold and the summer when it's hot. You got to get out there and do the chores you have to take care of your animals. There are responsibilities and decisions that come from making your choices for your livestock. There is feeding them, breeding them, so um, we learned a lot growing up. I would never change that experience.

Maniscalco: What were the good chores that you had to do?

Davis: Oh, pitching pens, feeding in general. I mean there is always having to go out there and feed. Then there's trimming hooves, there's pitching out the pens the allies, you don't get to use--

Maniscalco: What are the bad ones that you would trade with your brother for?

Davis: Oh I thought when you asked what the good ones were you were being sarcastic.

Maniscalco: I was like wow [unintelligible]

Davis: No, no, no, no that's the good one. No the good ones would be like feed the bottle lambs, that was one we really enjoyed or feeding the lambs because you could see what was coming up. What's new on the farm. So some of the not so enjoyable ones would be going out late at night and checking on the ewes before you go to bed. It's cold, you don't want to go outside, but you

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have to for five minutes just to make sure they are all ok. I didn't enjoy that too much, or cleaning out pens, pitching pens.

Maniscalco: Great. Anything else?

Cameraman: It's great, thanks.

Maniscalco: Can I quick get you to sign this?

Davis: Yeah.

Maniscalco: I think you meeting is going to start soon.

Davis: I'm sure it is.