

2001
Woman of the Year
in Agriculture



Barbara Carlton

Dear Friends of Agriculture:

The “Woman of the Year in Agriculture” award ceremony is always a much-anticipated event, adding to the excitement of opening-day festivities at the Florida State Fair. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been proud to sponsor this prestigious award in conjunction with the Florida State Fair Authority since 1985.

It is my pleasure to present the “Woman of the Year in Agriculture”

award for 2001 to Barbara Carlton of Arcadia.

The name Carlton is legendary in Florida’s agricultural history. Barbara has carried on the proud tradition of her family name, and is certainly one of the hardest-working women in agriculture. As operator of the family’s 17,000-acre Mabry Carlton Ranch, Barbara displayed her strength and resolve during some of the worst times. When cattle and citrus prices were depressed, against all odds she resisted efforts to divide and urbanize the family ranch and is now recognized as nothing short of a miracle worker. She is a pillar of support for youth programs like 4-H, FFA and the Sarasota County Fair, an outstanding spokesperson for Florida’s cattle industry, and a dedicated mother and grandmother.

As the most recent inductee into this exclusive group, Barbara Carlton joins 17 other women who have earned the respect and admiration of their peers by making outstanding contributions to Florida agriculture.

Again, it is my great pleasure and honor to congratulate Barbara Carlton for being named “Woman of the Year in Agriculture” for 2001.

Sincerely,



Charles H. Bronson
Commissioner of Agriculture





Barbara Carlton

Barbara Carlton has spent her entire life involved in agriculture. Born in 1936 in Willard, North Carolina, she was the fourth of five children. Her family was in the farming business, and her father also served as county judge. She learned hard work and the love of the land from her early days working in the tobacco fields with her grandfather.

She moved to Florida in 1955 and began work with the Crews family banking empire and rose to the position of head bookkeeper — one of the highest positions ever held by a female at that time. She met and married Mabry Carlton in 1961 and moved to Sidell, a small community in the eastern part of Sarasota County. From 1961 until 1980, the two were partners in running the family business and raising two daughters. The business encompasses 17,000 acres of mostly native palmetto flatwoods, and supports a cow-calf operation and 200 acres of citrus.

During these years Barbara and her husband remained very involved in community activities serving on various advisory boards



Daughters Lisa Carlton and Kimberly Carlton Bonner with Barbara.

“The Bible says that the key to wise living is hard work and doing whatever job you have to do well. And I certainly believe in that because I believe that through your hard work you might achieve some fame or riches. But that’s not what it’s all about. I think that to spend your time wisely while you’re alive doing good things, working hard, and that’s sort of my philosophy. Work hard, do whatever you have to do well, and life will be fine.”

— Barbara Carlton

and being active 4-H Foundation members. Barbara served on the original Historic Spanish Point Board. This board was responsible for preserving a 30-acre historic, archeological and environmental site tucked away behind U.S. Highway 41 in Sarasota County. Barbara was very active in numerous political organizations. The couple were also active members of their church.

Mabry and Barbara and their two girls were very involved with the county 4-H program. Weekends at the Carlton household included 4-H events as well as traveling the quarter horse circuit. They were a fixture at 4-H Club and Foundation events. The two never missed fair week or a steer sale night — they were even known to show up on sale night in formal attire coming directly from a political function.

They were always there to quietly assist a 4-H member whose steer did not quite make the grade or a young student wanting to attend college who could not quite make a tuition payment. Some of the young 4-H members who Barbara and Mabry helped never forgot that assistance and generosity, and continue to be in touch with Barbara even today. Through Barbara's involvement with 4-H children over the last 30 years she has truly adhered to the 4-H motto of making the best better.

In 1980, Mabry decided to take community involvement a step further and won a seat on

“My Mom exemplifies a very common trait in women that are in the agricultural business ... strength that she draws from internally and from her belief in God. Strength is what keeps this business going. And it is what kept us running this business for those times after Dad died. It would have been so very easy to have just given up. But in the ag business, it's very rare that you find a farmer that gives up. It's very rare that you find a land owner or a cattle or a citrus grower that just gives up, because we're the well of eternal hope — next year is going to be better; next year there will not be a freeze; next year this will be behind us. That is a common trait that is in all ag families, especially native families in the state of Florida, working together as a team, knowing that you're going to survive and knowing that this is important. This is important for not only your business, it's important for the future of the family. And when you have that as your basis, it makes it a little bit easier to continue on, even in the face of tragedy.”

— Lisa Carlton



Active grandchildren are a common sight in Barbara Carlton's office.

“I think what’s makes Mom special is her passion for life. How many women at 65 take care of four children under the age of 6 every day? She’s special in that she can be signing the payroll checks, taking care of the 2-year-old, the 4-year-old, the 6-year-old and the 18-month-old, keeping them all in line, and talking on the phone at the same time to a business partner or to our fertilizer salesman who might have called, or somebody who might have dropped by, our Farm Bureau rep, or anybody that happens by the office that day. She’s got an incredible passion for her family. She’s got an incredible passion for multitasking like none other I’ve ever seen. She’s just got an incredible passion for life and a real God-given ability to keep it all intact.”

— Lisa Carlton

the Sarasota County Commission. Barbara and Mabry believed it was imperative that those in the agriculture business become involved in the political arena.

It was during Mabry's year as a county commissioner that Barbara took a more active role in the family business. She experienced tremendous growth as an agribusiness woman and took on full responsibility for managing the ranch. Her nine-year training period ended in 1989 with Mabry's tragic death. Often when one partner in a marital relationship dies, the remaining spouse buckles under. Not so with Barbara Carlton. For 28 years she and Mabry shared common goals, interests and commitments. His unexpected death in 1989 was a terrific blow to her and to their daughters. This foursome spent years as a healthy, productive ranching family dedicated to preserving their land and serving their community. After Mabry's death some people quizzed her about what she was going to do. There wasn't any question but that she intended to continue to run the ranching operations.

Since Mabry's death in 1989, Barbara has continued to run the family business. She diversified ranching operations and brought the ranch into the computer technology age. She has battled excessive governmental regulations and increased global competition. Under the leadership of Barbara, the Mabry Carlton Ranch has proven to be an

"Mabry had been County Commissioner, he was serving his third term, for eight or nine years. And during that period of time he was gone a lot. It was a very time-consuming job and he tried to dedicate himself to doing a real good job. And so, he was gone, the girls were off in school, so I was left for those nine years handling not only the books, but dealing with the employees and the things that Mabry was not here to do. I was involved in just about every part of the daily work. I just learned more in those nine years than I could have ever learned if he would have been here, because he would have taken care of a lot of things that I wouldn't have known about. But in those nine years I really was involved. ... I was told by a good friend that God had a training period for me and it was those nine years that Mabry was not here. I thought that probably was true because I certainly did learn a lot in those nine years. I could never replace him. But you just go on. I wanted to retain this place a lot like Mabry had done it. He had certain things that he liked to do the way they had done it since the 40s. Some things he liked to change because he was very modern. But he had some traditions that he never wanted changed. And we still try to keep some of those going today with us."

— Barbara Carlton



Barbara Carlton, Rob Robinson, Lisa Carlton, Kimberly Carlton Bonner, Tom Bonner, and grandchildren Carlton Robinson, Mabry Robinson, Savell Robinson, and Katie Bonner.

"I think it's something that's in you. It's a way of life. I live out here, I love living out here, and the girls are out here. And, you know, to maintain a life that we have out here, we have to get up in the mornings and we have to talk about what's going on. And I can't, can't see myself ever not wanting to do this. I love to do it. I'm happy where I am. I can't think of anything that money could buy me that would make me happier. I can't think of anything that I need that I don't have. Maybe there's things I might want sometimes but I don't need them. I have everything that I need."

— Barbara Carlton

environmental steward of the land. Barbara was awarded “Farmer of the Year” by the Sarasota County Soil and Water District for outstanding accomplishments in resource conservation. In 1993, she was awarded the “Outstanding Cooperator” award by the Florida Association of Conservation Districts.

Barbara has also encountered the biggest challenge agribusiness faces in today’s society — the increasing demand for agricultural land to be used by the urban community. Barbara was the first private landowner in Sarasota County to successfully negotiate a conservation easement. The completion of a deal with the Southwest Florida Water Management District calls for preserving 4,800 acres of Mabry Carlton Ranch. Barbara’s leadership in the environmental area is a testament of her commitment to the future of agriculture.

Barbara’s two daughters are actively involved in the family business. Both are graduates of Stetson University, the alma matter of their father and grandfather. Kimberly Carlton Bonner serves as county judge for the 12th Judicial Circuit, and her husband, Tom, is a firefighter and paramedic with Sarasota County. They have a daughter Katie who is 2 years old. Lisa Carlton is an attorney and has served in the Florida House of Representatives and currently serves as a Florida State Senator representing the 24th District. Her husband, Rob Robinson, is

“She came to Florida and got married and had a family and was in the background for most of those years. And in the last dozen or so years has been the front person for our family and for our family business. I think what makes her unique is that she is utterly and 100 percent committed to the agricultural industry, to our business, to making it better, to doing it right, to being involved in the regulatory process, and always being receptive to new ideas and understanding that this business is a lot different than it was 25 years ago. We do business a lot differently than we did 25 years ago. And for someone who has watched it for so many years, I’m always continually amazed at how open and receptive she is. Both she and my father were very progressive and forward thinking. Even 20 years ago my father could foresee the days when they weren’t going to be doing things the same way anymore. I think her willingness to continually evolve in an industry that is so traditional, yet so progressive at the same time, is quite unique.”

— Kimberly
Carlton Bonner

"I just cannot imagine how life would be for me if I could not be here every day. I'm so lucky that the job that I have is something that I love to do. And I think that the biggest reward in life is to be able to spend your days doing something you love. I love my job of being here every day. We have great families around us. We have such a great community out here. I hope I can just stay here. And I hope that when I die I'm buried here, just like Mabry is buried on the ranch. So I don't want to ever leave. I'm going to stay here forever."

— Barbara Carlton

an attorney practicing in Sarasota County. They have a 6-year-old daughter, Carlton Elaine, a 4-year-old son, Mabry Robert, and a 2-year-old daughter, Savell Louise. Both daughters and their families live on the ranch beside their mother.

Barbara's days are filled with the business of the ranch and the business of grandchildren. She has taken on the job of full-time care giver to the grandchildren. With a ranch to run and four grandchildren in the office every day, things can get rather hectic. There is not a business partner, or agriculture salesman that has ever come to the office and not experienced talking business with the grandchildren present. However, those that know her know that she wouldn't have it any other way. For the most important task she has ever undertaken is ensuring that the next generation will grow up with an appreciation and love for the land. This will be her legacy.



T. Mabry Carlton Jr.
1935-1989



Previous Winners

- 2000** Helen Houck, of Perry
- 1999** Vina Jean Banks, of Balm
- 1998** Nancy Gurnett Hardy, of Winter Haven
- 1997** Gertrude "Trudy" Carey, of Hillsborough County
- 1996** Norma Stokes, of Highlands County
- 1995** Louve "Vee" Frierson Platt, of Clewiston,
and Patricia Robbins, of Miami
- 1994** Anne Wardlaw Dickinson, of Frostproof
- 1993** Sarah W. Bailey, of St. Johns County
- 1992** Carol C. Murphy, of Volusia County
- 1991** Ruth M. Tucker, of Brevard County
- 1990** Jeanette Barthle, of Pasco County
- 1989** Belle Jeffords, of Alachua County
- 1988** Carolyn Reed Kempfer, of Osceola-Brevard counties
- 1987** Dorothy Conner Shipes, of Lake County
- 1986** Ruth Wedgworth, of Belle Glade
- 1985** Jo Ann Smith, of Marion County



**Florida Department of Agriculture
And Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner**