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HOMESTEAD

Ag winner grows into farming life

Homestead farmer and agricultural pioneer Martina 'Teena' Borek was named Florida's 2004 'Woman of the Year in Agriculture.'

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Days after Hurricane Andrew blew out all the windows in her home and destroyed most of her farming equipment, Martina Borek was in Home Depot buying lumber to rebuild the barns at her farm.

The house could be fixed later, but planting season was in full swing, so the barns came first.

"I learned more about building that week," Borek said. "You live and you learn."

Borek, 50, considered by some to be an agricultural hero, received the 2004 "Woman of the Year in Agriculture" award Feb. 10. The award, sponsored by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida State Fair Authority, is now in its 20th year and, recognizes women who have made outstanding contributions to Florida agriculture.

"The award was a tremendous honor," Borek said.

Over the last 25 years Borek transformed herself from a stay-at-home mom into a successful farmer and member of the agricultural community.

"To take that farm and grow it -- she really is a farming pioneer in her own right," said Katie Edwards, executive director of the Dade County Farm Bureau.

A native of Newfoundland, Canada, Borek visited her aunt's farm in southern Miami-Dade County during summer vacations.

It was during one of these trips that she met her future husband Steven Borek.

The two married, started a family and immediately began their own farm, Steven Borek Farms. "Teena," as she is affectionately called, kept the books and cared for their two young sons while Steven ran the farm. Steven died in a 1980 pickup truck accident on their property, leaving Teena in charge of raising two toddlers and managing the farm.

An accountant by trade, Borek learned the farming ropes by attending every agricultural workshop and class she could find. She also got help and advice from the county agricultural center.

Borek is also responsible for some major changes to agriculture in the area.

She was the first farmer in Dade County to use a linear irrigation system and the first vegetable farmer in Homestead to use a computer for farm work.

Today the 400-acre farm grows sweet corn, green beans, heirloom tomatoes and miniature

vegetables.

"We call it the little farm that could," Edwards said.

But Borek, whose sons Steven Jr., 27, and Michael, 26, are now in the family business, said she would not have gotten this far without the help of good neighbors and the community.

"You're only as good as the company that surrounds you," Borek said.

"Florida is a state with the heart of a hometown and that's what makes it so great. People care about one another and that's what it's all about," she said.