

Family farm features 'cowgirls'

By Dieter Krieg

KUTZTOWN — Mirl-Carl Dairy Farm near here is no ordinary dairy farm — five blue silos give the visitor the first clue to that fact.

Other unusual features about this 400-cow operation are that the milking is done by four girls, only one hired man helps in the 1,400 acre set-up, no feed is offered in the 12-unit milking parlor, professional veterinary services are not used, and owner Carl Miller claims he hasn't sold a cow because of breeding problems in four years.

The uniqueness of the farm and Miller's agricultural business philosophy doesn't stop there. Describing himself as a man who "can't stand still," Miller says: "If I and my wife and the bank can't keep farming, then we're going to sell out." He is convinced the dairy business is here to stay and shows no concern about its future. "We all have to make the best of what we've got," he remarked at his kitchen table, adding that the future of his business rests with the entire family.

The father of five daughters and a son, Miller relies almost entirely on family help. His one hired man, Harold Kehl, helps out with field work and is counted upon a lot, especially as a mechanic, according to Miller. Sons-in-law, his father, and his father-in-law, Arthur Spatz, also help out part-time.

The four girls doing the milking include three of Miller's daughters and son Jeff's girl friend, Michele Gladney, a sophomore in the Kutztown High School FFA program. Questioned as to how and why they started as "milkmaids," their answers came back as varied as could be imagined.

Carlina, the oldest of the group, simply answered "I like it or else I wouldn't be doing it." She has been herdsman for Miller since March of 1972 and has milked at other dairies besides the one belonging to her father. She came back to the home farm, she explained, because "Daddy needed help." She's in the barn for both milkings, and

keeps records on the entire herd. "I like working with cows," she said in a convincing tone of voice.

Twenty-two year old Candy is the youngest of the milking quartet. Most of her time in the barn is during the early morning hours, and that's the way she likes it because it gives her the rest of the day "off." She couldn't have that with most other jobs "I like it alright," she affirmed.

"I like milking because it gives me extra spending money so I don't have to ask my husband for it," quipped 23-year old Bonnie, who was expecting a baby within three days of this interview and was determined to keep right on working until it was time to go to the hospital. "Once the baby is born," she added, "I'm going to take three weeks off." Extra spending money wasn't the only reason the girl mentioned for liking her job, however. "I've always missed cows when I was away from them, and I also miss the calves, cats and dogs, when I'm not on the farm," she said. Her father noted proudly that she had milked up to the morning of her marriage, then left the farm, but came back within a year or two.

Of the five daughters, four have left at one time or another, and all but one returned to do the work which they've been accustomed to since they were six years old. The one who chose a life away from the home dairy farm is Diane, but Miller is no less proud of her than he is of the others. He proudly takes visitors to one end of his barn, points to a huge painting, and says "Diane painted that when she was 11 years old." The fifth daughter in the family is seven-year old Tammy.

Michele claimed she liked milking a lot — adding enthusiastically that she liked farm life in general "a lot better than city living." She helps in the barn and parlor on weekends and holidays, oftentimes filling in as a substitute. Her sister, Susan, also helps on a part-time basis.

The working day at Mirl-Carl Farms begins at 4:45 a.m.

Each milking takes roughly 3½ hours. None of the girls help out with the field work. Son Jeff's main responsibilities concern the calves and youngstock.

Asked how it came about for girls to do the milking at the dairy, Miller shot back with the all-too-obvious answer: "I had daughters and only one son." Each of his children was taught to help with the barn chores from the time they were six years old. The degree of proficiency the girls had in their work was discovered more or less by accident one year, however, when Miller and his wife decided to vacation in Florida for two weeks. Miller's father, Stanley, supervised the work during his absence. The girls have been milking ever since, except for their regular time off, vacations, and travelling to meetings pertaining to the dairy business.

Miller started farming for himself at age 30 when he worked up an agreement with his grandfather. Purchasing his present farm in 1962, he has kept on expanding

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Four girls do the milking at Carl Miller's dairy farm, near Kutztown. Three of the four are the Miller's daughters, while the fourth is the girl friend of Jeff Miller, the Millers' son. Carlina, left, is in charge of the 300-cow operation and is in the barn every morning and evening. Next to her is Jeff's girlfriend, Michele Gladney. Completing the foursome are Candy and Bonnie.

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