

4-H dairy project turned into a family affair

By JOANNE SPAHR
NEWMANSTOWN, Pa.—The Richard Heilinger family, Newmanstown R2, is a 4-H dairy family. And, as far as they can figure, their involvement all goes back to their eldest daughter, Susan, age 14.

"Well, I wanted a project that I could keep from year to year," reasons Susan. And, as far as she can remember, that is why she chose to start a dairy project in 4-H four years ago.

Coming from a 46 acre "variety" farm in Lebanon County, she had a wide range of animals from which to choose a project. But, she didn't want to get attached to a steer or sow and then have to sell it, so she went the dairy route.

Up until that time, the farm had only one cow which the family used for domestic purposes, but, today, they have built up their number of dairy animals to 26, five of which are milking. And, of those five, three belong to Susan and her sister Patti, age 12, as 4-H and FFA projects. Their brother Bruce, age nine, in his first year of 4-H with the ELCO Dairy Club, has a calf.

Even Richard Heilinger, their father, has caught the "bug" and hopes someday to own a herd of about 20 animals for himself. At present, he is a tinsmith working for a firm in Ephrata. After a normal day at work, he comes home and farms part-time. He also helps out with the ELCO Dairy Club, where he has been a leader for three years.

But, this is not where the family's interest in 4-H dairy ends. They also belong to the Lebanon Valley Dairy Goat Club. They have three crossbred goats on their variety farm, two of which they milk.

This is where the youngest child in the family, Karen, age 17 months, gets into the picture. "She really does well on it," says Mrs. Heilinger (Jo). "She really does well on it."

In their involvement with the ELCO Dairy Club, the three children have different tastes in animals. Susan owns a Holstein and Patti and Bruce own Brown Swiss.

"She's smarter than I am," states Susan referring to her sister, "she never has

much competition when she shows."

Both Susan and Patti love to show their animals, and they especially enjoy the Lebanon Fair. They "practically take the whole farm" to that county farm show, as their mother says, pointing out that they take guineas pig, flowers stamps, chickens, rabbits, goats, and cows.

Susan has taken showmanship honors with her Holstein at the county fair, but Patti has garnered the highest acclaim with her two-year-old Brown Swiss. At the county roundup, she took junior champion honors as well as reserve grand champion. Then, she went on to district competition in Harrisburg and was again first in her class. And, finally, at the Junior All American, she was sixth.

As impressive as that record might be, her sister is quick to point out that Patti had only two in her class at the county roundup, compared to the stiff competition in the Holstein breed.

But, Susan keeps a stiff upper lip and looks toward the positive aspect of her showing experience.

"4-H really teaches you how to be a good sport," she points out with a big grin and a laugh.

4-H also teaches its members how to be leaders, as both Susan and Patti are finding out. Susan is the secretary in the ELCO Dairy Club and Patti is the news reporter. Susan is also the president in a third club the Fort Zellers Community Club, where Mrs. Heilinger is also a leader. Patti is also news reporter for that club.



Bruce, Patti, and Susan Heilinger are all involved in the ELCO dairy club. Both Bruce and Patti favor Brown Swiss, but Susan likes Holsteins, as

evidenced from their choice of breeds for dairy projects.

4-H has also helped to guide Susan in the direction of a career. She says she wants to "go deeper" into dairy and eventually wants to attend Penn State University for agriculture. She's not absolutely positive of her future goals, but at this point she thinks she would like to be an ag teacher.

At ELCO High School she is a member of the Future Farmers of America chapter, where she earned the highest honor given a first year FFA member—the Star Greenhand award. She also has a Holstein as a project for FFA as well as hay and veal calves.

And, unlike some students and 4-H members whose animals are part of their father's milking herd, Susan and her brother and sister don't expect their dad to do all the milking for them. Until a few months ago, they milked their own animals by hand at night, but recently their father purchased a milker, so the process is more automated, now. But, they still do all the evening work. Since, they go to school in the morning, their parents do the a.m. chores.

So, the whole family gets into the dairy act, an involvement that all began with a 4-H project and has blossomed into a family affair.

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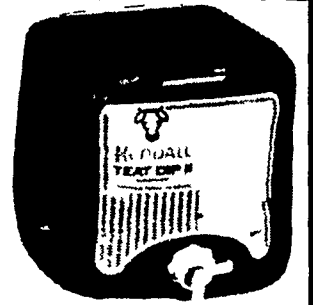
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