

Eastburn shifts from pumping gas to piping milk

CLAYTON, De. — The up-and-coming Cedarcrest-Vu Farm near Clayton, Delaware had its beginnings in a gas station on the busy Kirkwood Highway between Newark and Wilmington.

Donald Eastburn, Sr., owner of the service station, had no farm or veterinary background, just a sharp eye for a business opportunity.

Though his service station was turning a profit, he was intrigued by some of the things he saw happening at the University of Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station Farm in Newark, particularly Dr. George Haenlein's work with veal calves.

In 1970, with help from Haenlein and retired Delaware extension dairy specialist Dr. Wilbur Hesseltine, Eastburn set up a veal calf operation right next to his gas station.

During part of the year, Eastburn filled vacant calf pens with local dogs in need of lodging during the summer vacation period, thereby creating the only

combination veal-gas farm station-boarding kennel on the Kirkwood Highway.

At about the same time, Hesseltine involved Donald, Jr. in raising his own Holstein calf to show in the New Castle County Holstein Show. He caught on quickly, soon becoming an enthusiastic 4-H member. Between county fairs, the dairy calf just joined the "menagerie" at the filling station.

After a couple of years, veal prices took a dip so Eastburn phased out that operation in favor of the more lucrative dog-boarding business. But the Eastburns hadn't given up on the idea of farming.

When the family accompanied Hesseltine on an Extension Service sponsored dairy farm tour of Europe, they came home with a strong desire to try out some of the ingenious techniques they'd seen. By that time young Don's calf was almost old enough to milk or sell, so the Eastburns decided to milk.

They kept the gas station but also rented 1800 acres where they grew grain, gradually buying land and farm machinery and traveling around neighboring states to bid on high-quality dairy cows. A neighboring farmer, Ronnie Nelson, milked the cows and gave the Eastburns back the calves.

By June of 1979 they had 25 head, some still kept at the service station next to Shue School. The Eastburns realized they needed to find a more suitable location for their animals, so they made the decision to commit themselves fully to farming.

Eastburn came to the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service seeking help from several specialists in designing plans for a farm. He needed the plans to support his application for a Farmers Home Administration loan to purchase cattle.

The loan was approved and on June 15, 1979, the family moved into a mobile home on their land in

Clayton and started building a modern dairy operation from the ground up.

In a sense, Eastburn's inexperience has been an asset. Not having grown up on a farm, he's not burdened by prejudices in favor of familiar old ways of doing things. Instead, he's learning the latest scientifically tested, cost-efficient techniques from the Extension Service and farm magazines. Thus, his up-to-date dairy barn is completely automated and designed for easy cleaning and manure recycling.

One way Eastburn defies the conventional wisdom, with Haenlein's complete approval, is by making haylage instead of hay. In Delaware, Haenlein explains, it generally rains when it's time to make hay in the spring, resulting in delays and ruined hay.

Instead of waiting in vain for ideal hay-making conditions, Eastburn chops the partially wilted alfalfa and blows it into a silo. This haylage is just as nutritious



Donald Eastburn Senior and Junior stand flanked by the shining new silos of their Cedarcrest-Vu Farm near Clayton, Delaware.

for cows as hay, and Eastburn is spared the frustration and financial loss of having rain run his first hay cutting.

Rather than selling his grain, Eastburn keeps it to feed his own cows. He puts some of it into the silo while still somewhat wet. There it ferments into so-called "high-moisture corn."

The combination of ordinary silage, high-moisture corn, haylage plus a small amount of concentrates and minerals gives Eastburn's cows a balanced diet and saves him more money than he would have made selling his crops and then going out to buy feed for his cows.

Another unconventional decision Eastburn made was to build a traditional stan-

chion barn rather than loose-housing or a pre-fabricated corrugated metal barn.

Eastburn has a bigger investment in housing, he admits, but he's building a top-quality registered Holstein herd, and he wants to be able to show it off to best advantage when buyers come to call, particularly since the annual meeting of the American Holstein-Friesian Association is coming to Baltimore, Maryland next year, and top buyers from all over America will be touring area farms.

Eastburn is building his farm with an eye toward the future — his family's future.

Donald, Jr. has graduated

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