

Spring Bottom Farm goes from wild to winning

BY SHEILA MILLER
FAIRFIELD — This year's top selling Polled Hereford at the Maryland Association's Black-Eyed Susan Sale was consigned by one of Pennsylvania's top breeders, Spring Bottom Farm.

Spring Bottom Farm began its quest for the top about ten years ago, according to Frank Darcey, Jr. the owner of the operation. And, like every other success story, there were some rough times and growing pains in this one, too.

Not always in the cattle business, Darcey worked in commercial construction before coming to Adams County.

"I used to come to Adams County to go hunting," he said, "and I always liked the

area. My wife, Becky, and I decided to look around for a farm and when we found this one, we made our decision to buy it the day that we saw it.

"We used to come up on week ends from Rockville, Md. and we leased out the land to a local farmer. He would turn his cows out on the farm in Spring and pick them up in Fall.

"Well, one weekend, when it was about time to head back to Maryland, Becky said, 'I wish we didn't have to go back', and I had the same feeling. That's when we made the decision to move up to the farm permanently.

"We got into farming by coming in the back door, really. When we moved up here for good, we found the farmer that had been renting

the land had abandoned four Hereford calves. They were running loose over the farm, too wild to catch.

"I asked the farmer if he wanted to sell the calves, and I gave him \$50 a piece. Then came the task of trying to tame them."

Darcey recalled that a local livestock dealer told him to take a piece of plywood and tie a rope to it. Then, each day, he said, Darcey was to put feed on the plywood and keep moving it closer to the barn each time.

Within four days, Darcey said, he had the calves to the barn. But, when he and Becky tried to shut them in the barnyard, they broke through the fence.

"After they had broken through the gate for the second time, we put up brand new fence and a good strong gate. But, by this time, whenever they'd see Becky and me outside, they wouldn't come in the barnyard to eat.

"So, we had to out smart them. We decided that Becky would walk back into the house, and I would hide by the barn. Banking on the fact that the calves couldn't count, I waited until they sneaked into the barnyard and slammed the gate behind them. We had them finally."

Since his original purchase of the four wild Herefords, Darcey has kept on buying cows. Next Spring, Darcey noted, he will have 52 cows that will be calving. He said he has had as high as 80 head of cows, but since he has



Darcey takes time out of his busy schedule to show off his prize-winning herd to a visiting cattleman.



Marking the farm lane entrance, Darcey's sign let's everyone know which breed he likes the best.



Becky's Shropshire sheep are following in the hoof-steps of the farm's Polled Herefords, winning ribbons and trophies at local fairs.



Spring Bottom Farm exhibited the grand champion female in the Polled Hereford shows at Farm Show and the Keystone.

been culling his herd, his cow numbers have gone down. He added the original four Herefords are no longer on the farm.

"After I started culling, in three years my herd average has risen over 150 pounds in weaning weights," Darcey said. "My bulls average 595 pounds and my heifers average around 476 pounds."

Darcey is a firm believer in performance testing. He pulled out a thick volume of computer print outs of the Polled Hereford Association's Guidelines Program.

"I cull the cows in my herd with less than a 100 ratio,"

he said. "I've gotten my herd ratio up so high, that to keep improving it, I've got to have ratios over 100."

He added that each herd record is a reflection of only that one herd. It can't be used to compare two herds from two different farms. "In a herd with a very high herd ratio, a cow that is ranked with a ratio of 99 may in fact be better than a cow in another herd with a ratio of 110.

Darcey said his philosophy is that you have to take a hard look at your own herd in order to compete with yourself. Points he uses when determining which

cows to keep and which to cull focus on whether the cow has had a calf every year.

Darcey said he also looks at the cow's milking ability, her mothering ability, and her ease in calving rather than her size when deciding on his culls.

Ease in calving is an area where Darcey puts a lot of emphasis. He noted that you don't want to have to help the cows and heifers calve if you don't have to. But, he said, he has an agreement with his local veterinarian that a heifer gets help if she hasn't

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Pa. Polled Hereford is top selling cow at Md. sale

FREDERICK, Md. — The highest grading and highest selling Polled Hereford consigned at the Maryland Polled Hereford Association's Spring Sale came from Spring Bottom Farm, Fairfield, Pennsylvania.

The cow, calf pair sold to Pleasant Knoll Farms, Libertytown, Maryland for \$1600. This high selling female is a Citation daughter, and recently dropped a calf bred by Royal Leige, the 1978 Farm Show champion bull.

The average price for the 51 lots sold at Saturday's sale, held at the Frederick Fair Grounds, was \$706. According to Thelma Mills, secretary of the Maryland Polled Hereford Association, this sale was down in prices paid for cattle from last year.

"The bulls were a big disappointment," she said. "We just don't have a bull market in Maryland, and the buyers weren't there."

The top bull at the sale was a Gilead 2AA son consigned by Huckleberry Hall Farms, Smithsburg, Md. He sold to Valley Brook Farm, Stevenson, Md. for \$1275.

Mills pointed out the top

selling animals went better than the top cattle sold at last year's sale. But the few junior calves that brought less than \$400 brought the sale average below the previous year's figure.

A Pennsylvania farm bought the top senior heifer. JDH Polled Herefords, Dover, brought a Huckleberry Hall heifer back across the Mason-Dixon line for \$1375.

The top junior heifer went to the volume buyer at

Saturday's sale, Pleasant Knoll Farms. Mills said this Maryland farm has finished up its herd building, stopping at around 100 cows. The farm, which has been in operation for about one year, couldn't pass up the tremendous buys at this year's sale, she added. They purchased the Walnut Hill Farm heifer for \$1500.

The cattle were judged by Connie Grove, general manager of Devreau-Solel Farm, Downingtown.



This Spring Bottom Farm cow and calf brought the highest bid at Saturday's Maryland Polled Hereford Sale.