

# Walebe Farms, where excellence is measured performance

BY SHEILA MILLER

COLLEGEVILLE — Can a boy from southern York County who moved to the farm at age 11 and moved off at age 14 become one of the leading dairymen in the state and perhaps the nation?

The answer is an emphatic "yes".

Living proof of this success story is Earl R. Waltemyer, owner and general manager of Walebe Farms, Inc., here in Montgomery County.

Driving past the stoned entrance sign displaying the farm's crowned Jersey cow logo, a visitor to Walebe Farms is bound to be impressed with the operation.

On the right are rows of greenhouses where people from near and far come to purchase the farm's home-grown bedding plants, house plants, and shrubs.

To the left are manicured and landscaped lawns bordering paved parking areas next to the farm's own dairy store. Here customers can buy milk and ice cream from the farm's top-notch Jersey herd, along with baked goods and vegetables.

School children, eating and sometimes wearing their tasty ice cream cones, rush past on the way to the barn to watch the milking of the farm's 400 cows from a vantage-point platform above the carousel parlor.

Leaving the hustle and bustle outside, a feeling of organized

calmness greets the visitor inside the farm's business office. There, keeping everything under control and running smoothly, is Earl Waltemyer.

Rightfully proud of his almost-twenty-year-old operation, Waltemyer leads the way on a tour of Walebe Farms.

After a quick visit through the commercial greenhouses and diet-disaster dairy store, Waltemyer enters one of several barns. This one, he explains, houses the special attention cows — those being treated with medicine, recovering from calving difficulties, or other ailments.

Stepping up through a doorway, Waltemyer enters the milking parlor where five groups of registered Jerseys and Holsteins ride the 10-cow carousel from 7:30 in the morning until around 5:00 in the evening.

Waltemyer reveals, with justifiable pride, that this carousel was the first one ever built in the entire United States. This December, it will be 10 years old.

Over the years, Waltemyer has been open to the advice and suggestions of other dairy producers. And, in 1971, when Rotary Exchange farmers from New Zealand traveled to his farm and mentioned the idea of installing a carousel, he said he got one the telephone right away.

"We were in the process of installing a herringbone parlor at the

time. We even had the pit dug and the equipment here.

"I called Bou-matic and it just so happened they had the first carousel in their factory, but the stalls had to come from England.

"When I ordered the carousel, it was supposed to be delivered by August. But because of the dock strikes that were going on at the time, we didn't get it until December — and then we had to go to Wisconsin to pick it up. Our first cows went through the carousel the week after Christmas," he recalls with a smile.

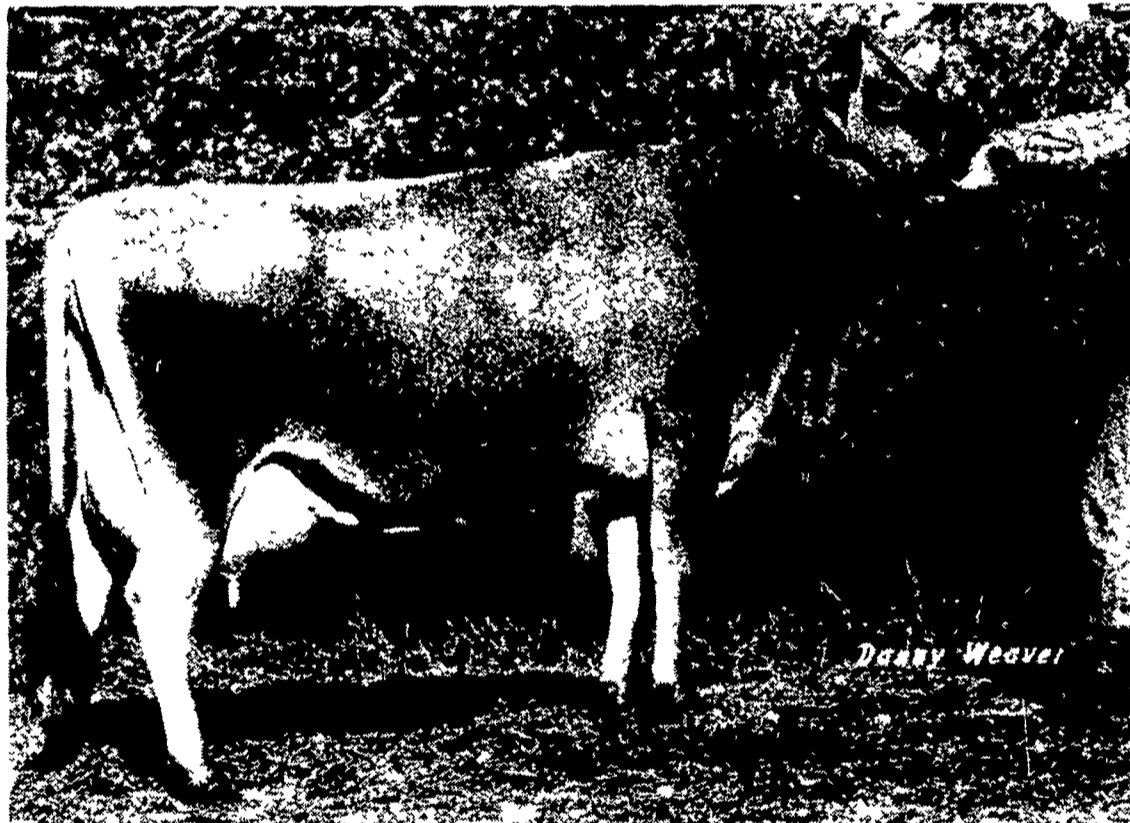
The carousel, operated by two full-time milkers who happen to be women, features automatic take-off and a double line system — milk flowing through the low-line and vacuum in the high-line.

A crowding gate encourages even the reluctant cow to hop on the milking merry-go-round and begin her short trip around the parlor as intrigued spectators, numbering close to 1000 on weekends, look on from above. The cows don't seem to mind being the center of attention, says Waltemyer, noting they're quite used to people.

With so many watchful eyes taking in the milking procedure, Walebe Farm's general manager is adamant about cleanliness and handling animals properly. For that reason, he explains, he has been hiring women milkers for the past 8 years.



Earl Waltemyer gives Favorite Deb, the national Jersey milk and fat champion, a playful hug and scratch on the cheek as she relaxes in her private stall, 'carpeted' with loads of wood shavings.



Two-time President's trophy winner, Rocky Hill Favorite Deb, moved to Walebe Farms last December. This outstanding Jersey cow

boasts a USDA cow index of +1,408M, +72F; with a type index of +1.02; and a performance index of +294.

"Women seem to have a better temperament toward the cows," he says after a few seconds of thought. "And they have less tendency towards abuse, although that's never been a real problem here. Of course, it all depends on the attitude of the individual."

As each cow takes her place on the carousel, she is washed with a warm water and mild iodine solution. The milker wipes the cow dry using an individual terry towel as the circular milking machine begins its rotation.

Waltemyer points out how the milker wipes the udder once, then flips the terry wash cloth over and checks to make sure the teat ends are clean with a final wipe.

"It used to take two paper towels per cow to get them dry," he says. "Now, with one terry towel, we get the cow cleaner and dryer — and I think the soft, terry cloth gives more stimulation.

"Early this January we bought \$90 worth of wash cloths — and I believe we still have another five months wear left in them. We wash the towels in hot water and Tide every day. A big box of Tide costs \$7.99 and lasts sixteen days.

"With paper towels, we were spending \$79 a week. It didn't take me long to see the light."

Since his switch to terry towels, Waltemyer says he's not seen any increase in bacteria or somatic cell count.

"We're less than 250,000 on our normal somatic cell count systematically. And our last bacterial count on the tanker loads was 10,000 to 2,000," he notes.

Admitting he did have a mastitis problem when he purchased his Holstein herd about four years ago, Waltemyer blames most mastitis troubles to people problems rather

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Walebe Farms' milking carousel, in its tenth year of operation, was the first of its kind to be built in the U.S., says Waltemyer. School children and other visitors can share the camera's vantage point and look down on the entire

milking operation. The cows don't seem to mind being on display or even the tiny hands that reach down to touch their noses from the viewing platform above.