

Ralaine Jerseys find All-American fun, good for herd

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

HARRISBURG — For the Ray Sollenberger family of Bedford County, showing cows is an activity which is fun for the family as well as good for the herd. And they are quick to say it is well worth the effort it takes to work with a show string. Their prefix is Ralaine Jerseys and their 150-acre farm is located at Everett.

While they usually show 20 head at local fairs, they had eight animals at the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg this week.

Lori, 22, explains how she feels about showing her Jerseys. "We started in 4-H and it's become a family project. We think it is a challenge to breed good animals. There also is promotional value in showing — it is good advertising for the herd."

She also views dairy shows as good for the dairy industry as a whole. "You can promote your animals, and also talk to consumers and tell how good quality milk is produced."

Mrs. Sollenberger (Elaine) affirms that she and her husband got involved in showing cows only through 4-H. She states, "We didn't know a thing about it until 4-H. We started from zero. But now we see it as a way of improving the herd. It gives us a desire to improve and an incentive."

Ray laughs when he says he's heard showing called a disease, but adds, "There is a challenge to it. It has done a lot for our herd in challenging us to improve and find something better. We have a far better herd today, which is an obvious benefit."

In addition to Lori, there is a daughter Beth who is now an associate pastor in Florida and a son Leon who is a senior at Penn State majoring in Dairy Production. Lori explained how each of the children received a 4-H animal and the offspring of those animals are registered in their names. But, she said, they consider the animals as part of the family herd and will transfer them back into the herd.

The Sollenbergers milk about 60 cows, with about a third of them belonging to the children. Their herd average is 10,462 milk, 5.6 test and 591 fat. Protein is 3.9 percent and 404 pounds.

Elaine pointed out showing animals became a way for the children to earn money for college. "We decided to put the fair winnings toward a college education in lieu of having them take summer jobs."

This year they showed at the Morrison's Cove Dairy Show, the Bedford County Fair, the Huntingdon County Fair and the Fulton County Fair. Lori is modest about their achievements, saying, "We do pretty well at the local fairs where there is not a lot of competition. We had some junior championships."

"At the All-American we don't do real well. We won a class one year but we are usually in the middle with a few at the top. But a larger show is better. It's encouragement and it's more fun if there are more people." She added that it's especially nice to win at a big show.

While admitting that it takes a lot of work to be at the show all week, she states, "I almost feel like I'm on vacation." To prepare for the show Lori says she washed the cows when they arrived last Saturday and again on Wednesday the day before the show.

Lori says she helps with the hoof trimming and does "most of the clipping", something she considers a challenge. "You can make them look better. It is fun to start and see what you can do with them."

The animals are fed much like they would be fed at home, with the exception of silage which is omitted at the show. They are fed dry hay, grain and beet pulp when it is available. She adds, "The first week they are restless when they are tied. But, after that, they get used to it." She waters each animal four times daily and milks the mature animals with their own milker, selling the milk through the All-American facilities. She adds, "It's time-consuming to keep track of the animals."

Being former Pennsylvania Jersey Queen (1977), it is not surprising to hear Lori's enthusiasm for the Jersey breed, although she admits that people tend to like what they grow up with. But she says, "Jerseys are smaller, easier to work with and there is less feed cost because there is less body weight to maintain. Jerseys are the most efficient cow in converting feed to milk and the milk is higher in protein and higher in butterfat." She notes that this is especially good if the milk is shipped to manufacturing plants because there is a higher cheese yield.

While some people feel Jerseys have better temperaments than other breeds, Lori feels that is a reflection on how the animals are treated.

Lori's father also states Jerseys are the most efficient cow, and adds, "They produce the best quality milk overall. I enjoy producing a quality product."

Although his father raised Jerseys, Ray got the first one of his registered herd in exchange for combining oats for a neighbor. About 10 years ago, Ralaine became an all-registered herd.

Lori admits that sometimes she feels in the minority, but she thinks Jerseys are a growing breed. "We know several children who have started in 4-H with Jerseys and we have sold some Jerseys to Holstein breeders."

She says she feels component pricing is a good idea and that it would benefit both dairy producers and consumers. "If you want to sell milk—you need to get higher solids in the milk."

She is a strong believer in promotion, saying, "With consumption going down, we need to get it up. And dairy products are so important to your health. Milk is an inexpensive source of protein, and there are so many things in milk we all need."

She emphasizes that dairy farmers must not only believe in their product but also use it. She sounds like a Dairy Princess talking, and she did serve as an Alternate Princess.

A 1981 graduate of Penn State in dairy production, Lori is now working at home and plans to do some overseas service for about three years before becoming established in dairying. While she prefers Jerseys, she does not discriminate against other breeds, and while at Penn State showed a Jersey, a Holstein and a Brown Swiss at Penn State's Dairy Exposition. With her Brown Swiss, she was named reserve all-around champion and champion fitter. This year, as a senior, she didn't show a cow because of her duties as overall chairman of the Expo.

She also was a member of Penn



Taking care of eight show animals for a week means a lot of hard work for the Ray Sollenberger family, R3 Everett. Here Lori takes a

show halter from the show box, which contains everything necessary to keep a Ralaine Jersey looking her best.

State's judging team which placed fifth at the national contest last year.

In addition to showing cows, there are other good reasons to attend a show like the All-American. Lori says, "It's fun to be at one of the big shows. The All American is a very well run show. And, if you win a first here, it has prestige. Some of the people who win here are the same as those who win at the national show in Kentucky." The Sollenbergers attend that show occasionally and one year had a third in a class there.

Mrs. Sollenberger states, "It's nice to renew acquaintances and to see what others have that they didn't have last year."

Ray agrees about the value of going to large shows, "It's enjoyable to talk and visit with those who are there. It is enjoyable and educational."

The Sollenbergers are active in their church and in Extension activities at home. Elaine writes a column for a local paper and also writes the Pennsylvania Jersey newsletter and serves on the school board.

Lori says, "We're probably closer than most families. We like to do things as a family, and showing is something we've all worked at."



This beautiful two-year-old was one of eight head the Ray Sollenberger family showed at the All-American Dairy Show this week. Lori is at the halter, as she was for most of the show.

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