

# Dairyman's 24-year-old pledge comes true

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

LYNNVILLE — "When our first son was born, I told my wife that, if it was within my power, I would give all of my children the chance to farm if they wanted it.

"I told her we'd try no matter how many children we had.

"But also, I wasn't going to force them into it. The decision was entirely up to them.

"And I also promised myself that if the children didn't go into farming, I wasn't going to still be milking cows all alone when I was 70 years old."

These were the words spoken by Russell Dietrich, R1 New Tripoli, to, his wife, Elaine, back in 1957.

That was quite a challenge the young couple was establishing for themselves.

Russell was still on his father, William's, farm. It was still a year away from the time he and his wife would take over operation of the 35-cow farm. And three years away from the time they would purchase the farm.

There were few conveniences on the farm that are often taken for granted these days. The barn had no cleaner. The house had no central heat. There were only two earthen trench silos.

But today, an open house on the Lynnares farm, nestled in the Kistler Valley of northwestern Lehigh County, shows how the Dietrichs have lived up to that 24-year-old pledge.

And not only for the first born, son, Bill, who is married with two children, but for three other children as well.

Feature of the open house is the massive 210-cow free stall barn, new milking parlor, gravity flow manure system and other facilities that will permit herd expansion to eventually provide mutual operation and the opportunity for a chosen dairy livelihood for five families.

For on the farm now are not only Russell and Elaine and the eldest son, Bill, and his wife, Imogene, and their two children; but also son, Curt, and his wife, Brenda; daughter Robin, who graduated from high school last year, and son, Brian, who is a senior and president of the Lehigh FFA chapter.

And it's been quite a span of nearly two, and a half decades between the time the pledge was first made and now is being fulfilled.

"People often ask how I was able to keep all of the children on the farm," Dietrich said.

"Well, first, a lot of credit must be given to them.

"I remember one day when he



Lynnares Farm nestles in the Kistler Valley of northwestern Lehigh County near Lynnville. Large 268-foot-long free-stall barn is located in background. Just to left of silos is

loafing barn and new gravity flow manure storage system, which also features gravity loadout.

was 13 Bill came in and said he was going to do all of the plowing and field work.

"He'd be on the tractor before going to school and right back on it as soon as he got home.

"Then, Curt was different. He was always in the barn. When he started to talk, he learned the names of the cows."

Thus, the division of responsibility that is necessary for a large family operation began to form itself early. Now, Bill, is a partner and directs the field work. Curt, who graduated from Penn State in dairy science and will soon become another partner, is specializing in the herd management.

Robin is the calf expert and works in the parlor. Brian hasn't really specialized yet and enjoys all of the tasks.

"All along, I tried to involve the children in the decision making," Dietrich said.

"We'd sit around the table and discuss things and arrive at an answer."

And with involvement in the decision making came increasing responsibility.



This is interior of large free-stall barn with capacity for 210 cows. Drive-through feeding is done with mixer wagon.

And there's plenty of responsibility to go around.

Bill has some 350 acres of cropland to handle — about 180 in corn, 125 in alfalfa and 50 in wheat. There's also about 50 acres of pasture and woodland. All but 129 acres are rented, too.

As the finishing touches were being put on the expansion this week, Bill was busy with the sidehill John Deere combine harvesting corn off the sloping fields.

"The corn is spotty this year in this shale soil, but still a lot better than last year," Bill explains.

"I didn't measure it, but it's likely running about 100 to 110 bushels an acre. And in one of the low fields, probably higher.

"The high moisture shelled corn goes into the 20X60 Harvestore. The 90-foot Harvestore is already filled with haylage. The two concrete silos have silage.

"We also feed long-stem hay and bale the second cutting, probably about 200 tons."

Now, with the new facilities, the herd is gradually being increased. In the old stanchion, pipeline barn,

the Dietrichs were milking about 90 cows. With only 40 stalls, it was done in shifts, of course. Milking ran sometimes to three hours.

Already, there are about 125 milkers, mostly home-bred additions, well on the way to the eventual capacity of 210. Stock also includes about 125 heifers and calves, too.

The influence of son, Curt's, dairy science training is evident.

The gravity flow manure system featuring earthen bank storage and gravity loadout is a favorite of recently retired Penn State ag engineer Roger Grout.

And the 268-foot-long free-stall barn has rubber mats in each of the stalls — a bit unusual for a facility that large.

"It probably added at least \$50 a cow to the cost," Curt Dietrich explains.

"But we think it will be worth it in the long run. After all, a cow is designed for a pasture environment. We're just trying to get as close as possible to that environment with modern technology.

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Dietrich family includes, from the left, Russell; son, Curt; Elaine; son, Brian; Steve and Stacey. Missing from photo is Curt's daughter, Robin; and in right foreground, son, Bill and wife, Imogene, with their children, Steve and Stacey. Missing from photo is Curt's wife, Brenda.