

After death of her husband

# Farm woman overcomes tragedy to run successful dairy farm

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Dawn Baker is an attractive and petite 44-year-old woman and dairy farm owner, who enjoyed working with her father on the family farm when she was young, but never wanted to marry a farmer.

However, years later, she did marry a farmer and had eventually three sons. And though proud of her accomplishments, the Henrietta woman has gone through not only some beautiful, but also tragic times.

The unexpected happened to her family four years ago, when they lost her husband, Donald, 39, to a freak accident on the farm.

Looking back, she can talk openly about the 1978 death of a "good man" and the "good years that were too few."

"I'll never get over the real deep hurt," said Dawn of that January day. It was a winter of heavy snow and ice.

Dawn explained that they had decided to ignore the snow piled on the buildings. However her husband became fearful of the barn collapsing and injuring the cattle after hearing of a similar accident on a neighboring farm.

Dawn vividly remembers the day she arrived home to find a frustrated 19-year-old son searching for his father.

They found Donald under 15 feet of snow near the barn. He and the snow apparently went off the roof. The 6 foot, 250 pound farmer was unable to survive the fall, as the snow knocked the air out of him.

Dawn was left with two farms and their young sons. "I didn't have time to pity myself," she confessed. "My husband passed me the ball and I started to run with it."

She had always done the bookwork for the dairy farm, but suddenly she was forced into a much greater responsibility.

The Bakers had expanded their operation the year before. Dawn said there were things that had to

be completed immediately. "I looked at what I had to do, and said, 'Okay we're going to start.'" That's when the new bulk tank was installed, a contract with a new milk dealer was initiated, a tractor was purchased, and a new heifer barn went up.

As Dawn sits in her farm kitchen, she is proud of what she and her husband had built and the way she has continued to run the business. One can only be impressed with her determination, but it wasn't easy and she didn't do it alone.

"I really have good sons. It took them a little time to accept that they had to answer to me only. Donald and I always made decisions together, so they knew their daddy would have approved of my decisions," related Dawn.

To other farmwives she urges that the husband and wife team-up. Plan the life of the farm together so that both know the direction it is going.

"My husband had a lot of foresight. He left a will and planned ahead," said Dawn. "But there came a certain point following his death that I realized if I didn't manage, I'd lose the farm."

Making the farm pay for itself and continuing the operation to pass on to her sons, were her primary goals.

Dawn has confidence in her sons — Bradley, 23; Brian, 22; Jay, 17 — running the farm. "They have a good background." She explained that they've all had good teachers — her father and her late husband.

Dawn manages most of the finances and decides on the major changes for the 380 acre farm. They rent 146 acres nearby. Soon the Bakers plan to buy another farm, which they currently lease from a neighbor.

The boys, along with a young hired man, share the labor and physical management. They select the bulls, and decide when the crops are ready, along with the daily chores.



The Baker family gathers for a family picture outside their barn. Dawn Baker and her sons continue to operate the Blair County dairy farm after the death of her husband four years

ago. From left to right are: daughter-in-law Betty, son Brad, grandson Aaron, Dawn, son Jay and son Brian.

It's obvious why Brad, Brian and Jay have earned the praise of their mother. The Baker farm has been tops in butterfat in Blair County for the past three years. The current report shows the 106 milkers leading at 749 pounds. The half registered and half grade herd peaked 2 months ago in milk production at over 20,000 pounds. The female farmer said they are now a close second in the county and are averaging between 19,000 and 20,000 pounds.

The entire herd numbers 230. "We've had some tremendous grade cows that have helped us make some records," Dawn admitted. "We're one farm that doesn't show cows and we don't breed to sell. We simply produce milk. We have sold some registered cows at sale, but we don't have a name in those areas. We try to put milk in the bulk tank," added Dawn. "That's our big accomplishment."

They have about three cow families in the herd and this year plan on adding some new bloodlines. However it will be no major purchase. The Bakers normally raise their own cattle.

"We need to make some changes when we get around to it," said Dawn. The top priority of the close-



Dawn occasionally helps her sons at milking time. This dairy farm owner usually handles the finances for the 380 acre, 230 cattle farm while her sons handle the labor.

knit family, is getting the crops harvested and the cows milked.

Corn and alfalfa dominate the flatlands of the Morrison's Cove farm, along with some timothy and a little rye.

The cows are "number one" on the dairy farm. Dawn emphasized that their health, milking time, and feed are very important. She said that when the crops are at their peak, harvest begins immediately.

The feed program isn't much different from other farmers: grain, corn silage, hay and high moisture corn. The feed is analyzed regularly to find out where it is deficient.

Dawn doesn't sit down and take it easy after she makes her farm decisions. The energetic farmer has worked for the Spring Cove School District for eighteen years. Like at home, she handles the office work and real estate and per capita taxes. Working at home and away sounds as though it fills her life, but she still finds time to teach Sunday School, work for the church, and participate in the Business and Professional Women's Organization.

Complimenting the men on her farm once again, Dawn said they do real well when she's not around. "That's why I continue to work at the school district. Otherwise, I would stand in the house, looking out the window and worry."

In a money-saving effort, Dawn works to be efficient in the areas of gas, electricity and labor. The Bakers no-till to conserve fuel. They recently built a new implement shed to protect the machinery. The new bulk tank and the most recent project, - a heifer barn - were installed as labor-saving devices. Dawn admires and firmly believes in her new barn. This experienced farmer feels that sunlight and fresh air result in top cattle.

The very private woman is very much a part of her farm. She tells stories of her attachment to the cows, yet admits that this doesn't stand in the way of running the farm business. "If we have a cow that's not producing...she goes. With economics and the cost of labor to handle the animals we must run the farm as the business that it is."

Every business has low points, but Dawn Baker's farm is going through its peak years. She feels that they will hit bottom again sometime and experience some setbacks during future expansions.

Dawn is recognized by her male counterparts for her outstanding contributions to agriculture, but she believes that there were many excellent years before her

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## Homestead Notes



The Baker farm sets along Tussey Mountain in Henrietta. The farm includes 380 acres and 106 milkers which lead Blair County in but-

terfat, and are a close second in milk production, averaging 20,000 pounds.