

Vacations aren't so rare on the Ranck farm

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A summer vacation for a dairy farmer is often as rare as sunny days were this June. J. Ray and Reba Ranck milk about 45 Holsteins on their Rayba Acres Farm at 183 Black Horse Road in Paradise and since they cannot often go away, they bring tourists to their dairy farm and get to know other parts of the country through them.

Hosting tourists is certainly no vacation, but it is an education. The education is provided by both sides, because the Rancks use this opportunity to get out the farm story. Reba explains, "A lot of people ask questions, and we take that opportunity to tell them about farming. That way they learn that food does not grow on supermarket shelves."

In fact, one wall of the very beautifully-decorated upstairs of their home contains promotions sure to catch both eye and the memory of these tourists. Samples include: "Milk drinkers are better lovers;" "Milk-the Udder Cola;" and "If you eat, you're involved in agriculture."

Now in their 12th year of hosting tourists, Reba says, "I don't know exactly why we got into it, but we had three bedrooms we weren't using and decided to try it one year and see if we liked it." The next year they decided to put in an extra bathroom.

The Ranck's farmhouse is uniquely suited for a tourist home. Built in 1863, it has 19 rooms, and two stairways, which allow the tourists to have their own access to the upstairs and their own outside entrance. Reba says, "The house was laid out perfectly."

There are four bedrooms given over to the tourists plus two rooms they built over a recently constructed three car garage. The Ranck's daughter, Rhonda, 14, has gained an attic room, after years of giving over her bedroom to tourists in the summer. The two new rooms have their own bathroom, and the four rooms in the main house share a bath. One of the new rooms was designed for use as a recreation room for the Ranck children, but it offers a perfect setting for additional tourists.

The Ranck's can now host up to 22 people, using roll-aways, but they average around 15-20 people.

Most of the work of having tourists falls to Reba who schedules and cleans and often acts as unofficial tour guide, offering advice on things to do and places to see. Although there is complimentary coffee in an automatic pot in the upstairs hall, Reba says she has no desire to cook for her visitors. "Feeding my own family is enough," she says with a laugh.

Tourists take priority in the work schedule for Reba, who devotes

every summer morning to doing laundry, cleaning rooms and preparing for new arrivals. She launders towels every day, and there are frequent changes of sheets as well. She dusts daily, cleans the bathrooms daily and vacuums between visitors and as needed during their stay. She says, "Sometimes when the kids are in the hay now there is hay and straw everywhere, especially where they take their clothes off." Reba also makes beds for her guests if they don't do it themselves before they leave for the day.

Reba says, "You work yourself into a routine. I've learned to make things as convenient as possible. I keep supplies handy, and I bring a big wastebcan into the room rather than taking the smaller ones out. A routine has a lot to do with how easy it is. It's important to do it in order, and to take one last look before you leave the room."

There is a good side to all this work, Reba points out. "How else can you clean your own house and get paid for it?"

A real benefit to Reba as she works around the large farmhouse cleaning and making beds each morning is the portable telephone which her husband gave her as a gift. She uses it as a regular phone, and can make reservations for potential guests or let her notary customers know she is at home. She feels it is important because it prevents her from missing calls. "I carry it everywhere," she says.

There are some very positive benefits for the Ranck children. In addition to Rhonda there is Rob, 17, and Ryan, 9. "The biggest thrill is seeing the kids enjoy them. Having tourists has helped the kids appreciate what we have. It has made us all appreciate what we've got and what we take for granted. It makes the kids more satisfied, and makes them feel good. It makes us realize all the more our farm and our heritage," Reba explains.

The children become very involved with the tourists and help them by taking them through the barns or getting a game of baseball started. It helps their self-esteem when city kids exclaim about their expertise of farm equipment. Rhonda lightens the load by helping with cleaning chores.

Ray also gets into the act, and invites the tourists to watch the milking. He even allows them to try their hand at milking. "He enjoys it," Reba says. She points out that the few cows he allows tourists to milk are "so used to it" that they don't even flinch at the strange fingers milking them. Indeed, none of the cows bother to glance at the tourists when they stroll through the barns. The guests, of course, are thrilled with the first-hand experience.

Reba says many tourists say "We are going home to our farm," after a day of touring in the country.

Many of the Ranck's guests come from the city, and Reba says they think they are really going far into the country by the time they get to their farm. "It is so unusual to them. They can't imagine being in a place so free and open. Many



Keeping the farmstead neat is an important part of Reba's work. She sweeps outside as faithfully as she cleans the guests rooms. Here she works to keep the guests' entrance beautiful.



This pump brings many questions from tourists who stay in the Ranck home. It is powered by a water wheel in the nearby creek, and offers visitors a refreshing drink of well water. Many declare that it is the best water they have tasted.

people say to me, 'I admire your lifestyle. We see a lot of good in it.'"

There are an occasional few who simply cannot make the adjustment to the quiet of the countryside. One couple left after just one night and Reba learned later that it was because it was "too dark." This brought a chuckle to Reba who pointed out all the neighbors who have mercury vapor lights, including one on their own barn.

The Rancks are equipped to host some winter visitors since all the rooms are equipped with electric heating units (and air conditioning for the summer). Reba said, "Almost every weekend all winter we had someone. The weather has a lot to do with it."

She added, "The rain has really put a damper on the business. The first two weeks of June are down I don't think the economy has hurt us because people are taking shorter vacations and we are within a tankful of gas for many areas."

She said a low point in their 12 years of hosting came in the season that followed the local polio scare, TMI and the gas shortage. "As long as gas is available they come. More are coming and staying three or four days instead of just one or two days." Despite the slow June, Reba says, "We are still ahead of last year."

They had 1350 guests last year

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Rayba Acres is the destination of many tourists who wish to visit in Lancaster County. They enjoy the country setting and approximately half the visitors return, sometimes more than once a year for a short visit to rest and relax.



Reba Ranck pauses by the bunk beds her husband built into a closet space in one of the bedrooms of their farm home. The "around the world" quilts which grace the bunks and the double bed in the room were made by Reba in the winter.

Homestead Notes