

Sycamore Meade

(Continued from Page A21)

Betty bull put us back on the map as far as production goes," Brubaker explains. In fact, Brubaker recalls, that the bull's high PD was popular among commercial Holstein herds, during the 1960s.

"Earl Keefer was one of the first breeders in the state to get the Betty blood in his herd. And for the last ten years, his herd has been in the top ten for the breed in production," Brubaker says.

But the Betty bull came closer to the butcher shop than he did to A.I. service, Brubaker recalls. His Canadian breeder, Selwood Farm provided a New York A.I. stud with a bull in the late 1950s. However, a barn fire at the stud killed several bulls, including the Selwood delegate, explains Brubaker.

Meanwhile, the Betty bull was slated for baloney but instead was used to replace the bull killed in the barn fire. The rest, as they say, is history.

With the influence of the great bull behind him, Earl Keefer admits that his breeding is geared

more for production.

"We breed for milk. We're concerned about type but we don't breed for a show string," he says. And as the herd averages roll along, so, it seems, does type. The Sycamore Meade barn currently boasts about a dozen Excellents.

On Tuesday in the Farm Show large arena, the Keefer-Shetterly clan will make the most of a breeding philosophy developed over the past quarter century.

The 112-acre Dauphin County farm has been in Keefer's family since William Penn handed out deeds centuries ago. Earl's dad was a school teacher and left the farming duties up to his sons.

"The farm was pretty rundown then," Earl recalls. The mixed herd was milked by hand for a while until bucket milkers replaced the tedious task.

Eventually, Keefer phased out all other breeds to concentrate on his favorite — the Ayrshire cow.

"I'm fond of them for a number of reasons," he explains. "They're

efficient feed converters. You don't often see a bad udder on an Ayrshire and calving problems are almost unheard of."

As is on most family-run farms, Earl and Annabel, who was raised on a general farm in western Ohio, provided much of the early foundation work while their children were small.

Until a decade ago, the Keefers milked their growing herd on two separate farms, which were about three miles apart.

Annabel recounts one of the worst winters to hit Dauphin County. A heavy Thanksgiving snowstorm had downed several power lines, shutting electricity to both farms. Without an auxiliary generator, the Keefers worked long, long hours to tend the herd.

"We had to take the cows down to the run for water," she recalls. Their Thanksgiving dinner consisted of soup, which Annabel cooked with canned heat and hamburgers.

"The refrigerator wasn't working and the ice cream melted, so we drank ice cream, that day," Earl adds.

At first, the Keefers tried to milk by hand but quickly abandoned the

practice.

"We finally hooked a pump up to a tractor. It took us all day to milk. It was hardest on the heavy producers," notes Earl.

"About a half-dozen cows were in their peak, but after that they never came back," he adds.

Needless to say, the Keefers now have a generator.

"But we haven't used it yet," laughs Annabel.

Today, the Sycamore Meade labor force includes Earl, Donald Shetterly and Earl, Jr. Replacement raising has passed from mother to daughter as Sandra is chief calf raiser.

The 87-head milking herd benefits from a home grain mixture. A 14 percent protein mix of soybean meal, oats and ear corn, plus vitamins and minerals are part of a total mixed ration fed three times a day. Computed for 45 pounds of daily production, the TMR, which is fed in the free-stall bunk, includes (on a per head basis) 18 pounds of grain, 14 pounds of corn silage and 16 pounds of alfalfa haylage.

Cows producing more than 45 pounds get an additional slug of grain (a 20 percent protein mix) in the stall barn during milking.

Meanwhile at the Farm Show complex, Sandra, Donald and brood, will be putting the final touches on the show string. In 1981, the Keefers and Shetterlys walked away with virtually all the marbles when they collected the Grand Champion rosette and the Premier Breeder and Exhibitor banners.

In addition to the competition, the family looks forward to fellowship with other exhibitors and visiting with the non-farm public.

Earl chuckles as he recalls one Farm Show when the animals were bedded with straw that was stored at a friend's barn. The farmer had a few guinea hens on his place and evidently an egg was lodged on a bale. Before the day ended, Earl says at least one city visitor walked away thinking he had just met the first egg-laying cow.

In just one more week, Farm Show 1983 will be history. The Keefers and Shetterlys along with hundreds of other farm families will have collected more memories and hopefully more ribbons.

But more importantly, their participation and pride in showing and breeding quality animals are tools that can be shared with the non-farm public.

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