

# Kirks pan for golden glory

**BY DONNA TOMMELLEO**  
**PEACH BOTTOM** — Ethel Kirk can remember attending Lancaster County Guernsey banquets and watching other breeders walk to the podium for the high herd award.

"I used to wonder if we would ever do it," exclaims the Peach Bottom woman. But in the year of her silver anniversary in marriage to dairyman Francis Kirk, Ethel stopped wondering.

During the 1982 Lancaster County Guernsey banquet, the Kirk's Cedar-Fringed prefix popped up more times than mushrooms after rain. Ethel walked to the awards table so much, there probably will be an irreparable path in the Refton Fire Hall from now on.

When the evening ended, the Kirks walked off with the following awards: high 3-year-old for milk at 22,607 pounds; high 3-year-old for fat at 965 pounds; high 4-year-old for fat at 952 pounds; high aged cow for milk at 22,267 pounds; high aged cow for fat at 1,033 pounds.

In all, the Kirk's 113 registered Guernseys pumped out an average of 15,329 pounds of milk and 687 pounds of butterfat.

The golden girls not only succeeded in driving the Kirks to the top of Lancaster County charts for milk, but the rumble from State College confirmed the Peach Bottom family had the highest Guernsey milk figures for the state.

At one point, the herd had grown to 130 milking cows but after a heavy cull of any animal milking less than 12,000, the Kirks have whittled the "wet brigade" down to 79 head.

And while Francis and Ethel hauled home the numerous awards, last year, the other half of the work force was back at Cedar Fringed Farm, tending to the top herd.

"Tom deserves the credit," Ethel says of her eldest son. "He's in charge of the feeding and breeding."

Ethel recalls watching Tom, when he was a 4-year-old toddler, run out to the barnyard to bring in that stray cow who missed her call for milking.

All together the Cedar Fringed work force includes Francis and Ethel, their sons Tom and Robert and two full-time employees.

The Kirks' daughter Mary, was

active in the farm while growing up but is now a nursing student at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

Tom explains the Cedar Fringed herd (so named because the homestead is settled among cedar tree barrens) is fed corn silage year round. A twice a day ration includes corn silage, an 18 percent protein ear corn supplement and alfalfa-grass hay. Cows producing more than 60 pounds daily earn the right to munch on a 20 percent protein feed.

Guernsey sires must have a predicted difference for milk of not less than +800 pounds. Bulls like Big Tex, Admiral, Telear and Top Hornet sons boast the figures that Tom likes to use. The herd's calving interval ranges from 12.9 to 13 months, says Tom.

"We breed a cow three times. If she isn't caught we turn her in with the bull," he explains.

The Kirks' heifers run with bulls for their first breeding. The current service sire is out of 19,000 pound dam.

While her sons are busy taking care of the adult animals, Ethel expends her efforts in the calf building with the future herd.

When it comes time for field work, the man that knows the land best is in the tractor seat.

"I know about every soft spot on the farm," Francis notes.

When his father Howard Kirk purchased the 165-acre farm in 1943 for a sum of \$10,000, Francis remembers the land's condition.

"Everything was in bad shape," he says. "There were gullies so big, you could bury a tractor in them."

In the 1960s Francis began working with soil conservationists in the county and developed a plan. Several waterways and terraces later, the plan was completed in 1982.

On the surface, the Kirks' land annually yield alfalfa, orchard grass, reed canary grass and corn. But Francis notes that there is more to the land that meets the eye.

Farming a mixture of Chester loam, Serpentine rock and soapstone, the Peach Bottom farmer can survey a swath of ground and point to stones that contain iron ore, chromium and other semi-precious stones.

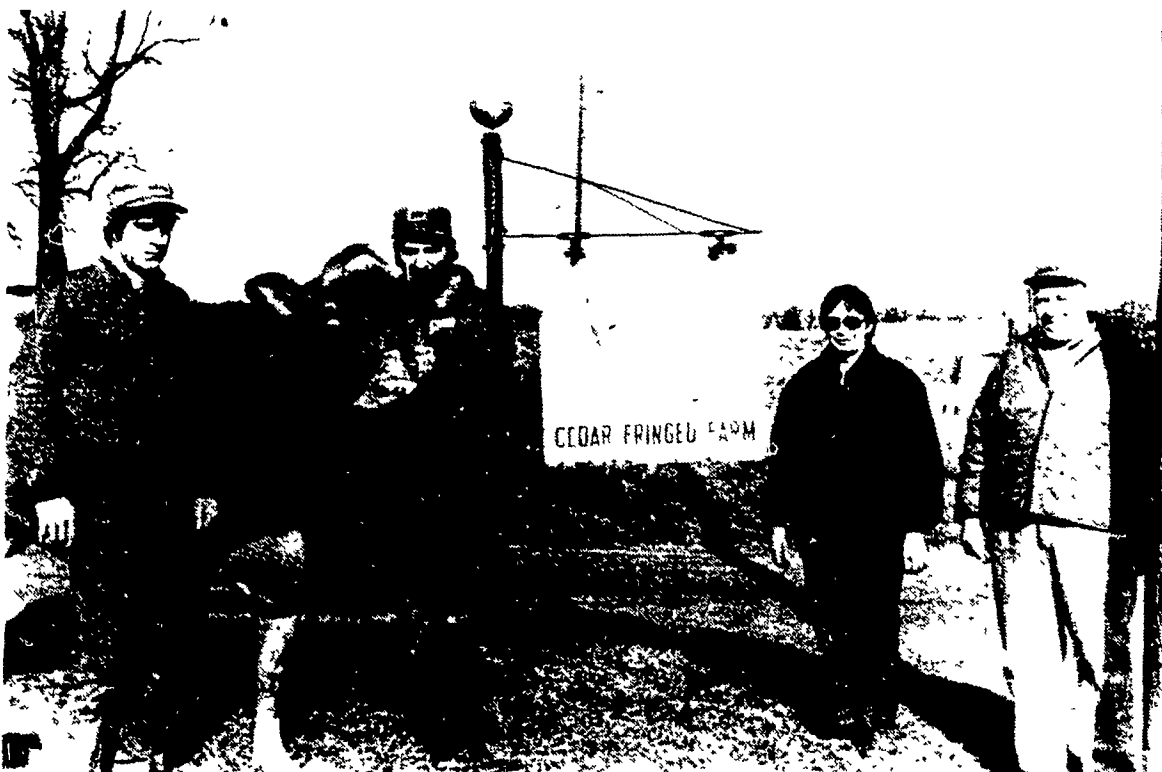
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Francis spends a few minutes with Tom Johnston, Lancaster County Conservation District Administrator, while inspecting one of the many terraces on the Kirk farm. The family recently completed their conservation plan with the LCCD.



Cedar-Fringed Farm, home of the top Guernsey herd in the state, rests on a mixture of unique soils. Yielding corn and alfalfa for herd needs, the serpentine rock and soapstone, on the Peach Bottom Farm, have captured the interest of gem and artifact enthusiasts, who have uncovered everything from iron ore to crude hand tools.



The Cedar-Fringed work force flanks one of its "wetter" members, who helped push the Peach Bottom family to the top of the DHIA chart for high Guernsey herd for milk in the state, at 15,329 pounds. Flanking Cedar-Fringed Moon Glow is the Kirk family, from left: Tom, Robert, Ethel and Francis.



History and antique buff, Francis can turn back the hands of time as he jogs his memory and knowledge generations back into the Kirk family and its land.