

Guernsey gold shines at Lebanon Valley Farms

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PALMYRA — Sitting unobtrusively on a hill along the borough lines of Palmyra in Lebanon county is the Smith family's Lebanon Valley Farms. Although active in the Guernsey breed for many years, the Smith herd has come into the limelight during the past few years.

More than half a century old, Lebanon Valley Farms was started by the late Jacob Smith. Jacob farmed on a part-time basis while working as a milk tester. He purchased brucellosis reactors from local farmers and kept these cattle at one of the two barns on his farm until they tested negative. His purchases included both Holsteins and Guernseys, but he eventually settled on Guernseys. Jacob was very active in the Pennsylvania Guernsey Association and has passed his love for Guernseys on to his son and grandsons.

Robert Smith and his sons have entered the limelight recently with their outstanding winnings on the tanbark in both Maryland and Pennsylvania as well as All-American nominations on some of their cattle. Bob and his oldest son, Dave, are involved on a full-time basis on their 180-acre farm. Tom, a senior at Delaware Valley College, is involved part-time.

The Smith's herd of 70 Guernsey cows has proven its excellence at the milk pail as well as in the showing. To what do they attribute their success, particularly in difficult times? "I'm convinced it is in the management," Bob said. He also agrees with the statements that are heard again and again, that management will be the determining factor in the financial stability of the farmer today.

In response to the question as to what he sees the dairy industry doing in the future, Bob said, "It's going to get worse before it gets better. I hate to see it happen, but the inefficient people are going to be weeded out. We do have a surplus and something must be done."

With a chuckle Bob added, "If everyone milked Guernseys or Jerseys we wouldn't have as much of a problem." He referred further to the increased solids content in their milk and the resulting increased efficiency while consuming smaller amounts of feed.

The Smiths carry the efficiency of Guernseys to the maximum. In December they had a protein test of 3.9 and a herd average of 13,680 with 650 pounds of fat. They operate a retail store where they sell Golden Guernsey milk, ice cream and cheese. All these products are made from their own milk. They find that many customers prefer the milk with higher solids over that found in the local retail markets.

The addition of cheese to the store's inventory took place after a trial run of taking 1,500 pounds of Guernsey milk to an area cheese factory. They received back 186 pounds of Monterrey Jack cheese. The staff at the cheese plant was amazed at this yield of 12.26 pounds per 100 pounds of milk. The normal yield is 9.5 pounds/100 of milk, and the Smith's was their highest ever. Bob quickly notes that Guernsey efficiency is proven again, and an added benefit was the cheese company's awareness of Guernsey's higher protein content.

The Smiths are very aware of public relations in marketing their product. They host farm and dairy store tours by local school groups.

Family with Farm Show champion



Lebanon Valley Farms is a family farm run by Bob and Betty Smith, in back, son Tom at the halter, and Dave and Sharon Smith, in front. They are shown with Lebanon Valley Hornet Milano, their recent Farm Show champion. She has a record of 19,472 of milk and 925 of fat with 3.7 protein.

The tour includes milking a cow by hand and follows milk from the cow all the way to the store shelf. The result has been more knowledgeable children and possibly increased retail sales. The clerks frequently hear children in the store say, "I was back there," (indicating the bulk milk tanks in the back of the store).

Dave also believes that dairy product marketing should concentrate on protein content of milk rather than butterfat. "People are afraid of high fat foods, and protein is associated with health and body-building." The milk the Smiths market has a low butterfat level yet contains increased solids. Efficiency is definitely a way of life at Lebanon Valley Farms. The production records are accomplished on a minimum of feed and forage, of which the Smiths must purchase 20 percent of what they use. Bunker silos are used to store corn silage. Hay is fed throughout the year and is given before the grain which slows the passage of grain through the rumen and also increases the butterfat content.

Grain is fed four times a day. The total amount is the same as would be fed twice a day. The result of this practice is that milk production and increased butterfat

Promise of the future



What is in store for the future for the Smith family is Lebanon Valley Star Madonna, an outstanding junior yearling.

and protein are achieved without spending additional dollars.

Pasture is at a minimum and cattle are turned outside for only one-half to one hour at a time. There are six fans in the barn which serve to keep the barn cool during hot summer days. It is not uncommon on this farm to find the barn is the coolest place. They have found that keeping cows comfortable is another inexpensive management practice which results in increased production.

Management is also important in field work. Alfalfa is watched closely and is cut before it blooms. Preservatives are used if necessary to get the crop out of the field before a summer storm. They are also working to increase the efficiency of their corn production. The most recent change has been to decrease the amount of fertilizer used and to side-dress with nitrogen. The machinery used is not "the latest" but is adequate.

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Pride in trophies



Dave, left, and Tom Smith display a few of the awards they have captured this year.

A lineup of Guernseys with their owners



Bob and Betty are very satisfied with Lebanon Valley Farms Guernseys. Their sons represent the third generation on the family's farm.

All-American honors



Lebanon Valley Super Kanaga, a 4-year-old owned by Tom, received honorable mention in Junior All-American nominations as a senior yearling. She recently classified very good at 86 points.