



# DAIRY'S FUTURE

Whatever it holds,  
it's in your hands



The attitude of farmers, Angie Koontz believes, is changing for the better.

(Continued from Page A1)

had with the milk diversion program is that there were so many unanswered questions," he said. "Even the bottom line, the Secretary of Agriculture can change it at any time."

Signing up for the program would also have hurt the Koontz merchandising potential. Raising a herd of 100 purebred Jerseys, the Koontz supplement their income through merchandising. They currently sell cattle at about a half dozen breed sales a year.

"We couldn't have done that on the diversion program," Don said, adding that any merchandising operation would have suffered through the program.

As an example of this, Don talked of a breeder who merchandises cattle. The dairyman

signed up for the program and has since found himself alienated for the length of the program.

Don also remarked on the program's effectiveness, questioning the fact that many farmers who signed up plan to return to their normal production after the 15-month period.

"Everybody you talk to sounds like their goal is getting back to where they were," he said. "You can't blame anyone for it, but it makes you wonder about the program."

### Getting Started

The effectiveness of the milk diversion program is not the only thing the Koontz family is wondering about. They are also wondering about their future in the dairy industry.

When Don and Angie dipped

their hands into dairying, they had no second thoughts about their farming career. They began by farming in partnership with a Bedford County man who was a professor at Wayne State University in Michigan.

"He gave us everything to manage, the books and all," Angie said. "It really taught us a lot. It taught us what we can do and what kind of debts we can manage."

With the professor/partner out of state, Angie and Don got the full-scale of farm responsibilities. This was to their advantage.

"I think that's a mistake of a lot of parent-son relationships," Angie said. "The fathers don't give them the book end and the sons want to do all these things, and they don't see what it costs."

Getting two aspects of farming - the economics and the management - Don and Angie found themselves ready to venture out on their own. They bought the Bedford County herd of 90 Jerseys, young stock included, and moved to Mercer County where another dairy operation was waiting for them.

Signing an agreement with Larry Unan, the farm's owner, Don and Angie took over the dairy on a lease/purchase basis with a seven-year option to buy. That was in August, 1979. They bought the farm in May, 1983.

"Our thinking was to take the debts in step," Angie said.

"Our mortgage payment would be about the same as our rent," Don added, "and it looked like interest rates might start climbing. They had dropped at that point as much as they would."

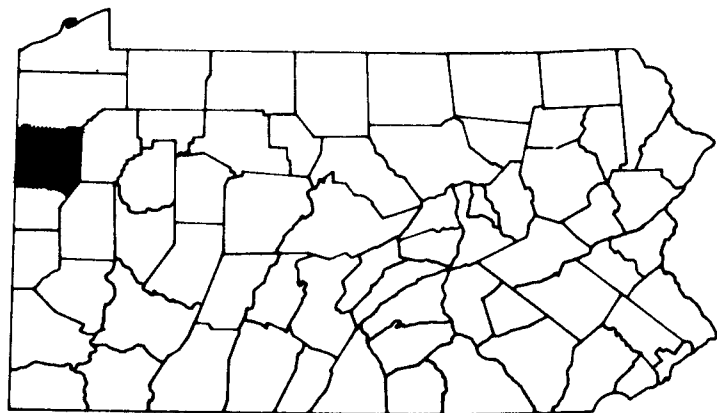
Not wanting to borrow money other than for cattle and milking equipment, the Koontz decided not to expand their farm from the current 64 acres. Under the agreement with Larry Unan, feed was supplied and hay was purchased at local auctions. This system had worked as well and Don and Angie saw no need for change.

Not owning any machinery, except for one tractor, all field work on the Koontz farm is done through custom work. Buying machinery would not justify the costs.

"We only have 64 acres," Don said, "so that wouldn't justify buying machinery. We would have



Don Koontz is a firm believer of producing and selling a quality dairy product.



to farm more acres and then get more help."

And farming additional acres would take time away from what the Koontz family enjoys most - working with cattle.

### Cattle Goals

"What we wanted to do was concentrate on what he (Don) was good at and what I was good at," Angie said, "and that was the cattle."

Concentrating on the cattle is the philosophy that Don and Angie work into their operation. And as Don admitted, he doesn't care much for working in the fields, anyways.

"I think that's the main problem with a lot of people," he said. "They try to do too much even if they're not good at it. Life's too short to spend it on something you don't like."

So the Koontz family spends its time working with the cows. This includes paying close attention to cow comfort, nutrition and health. It also includes increasing herd production and type.

When Don and Angie started farming five years ago, their herd average stood at 9,000 pounds of milk. They didn't have the best

cows, Angie explained, as they were buying cattle for a combined production and type background.

"They weren't very pretty," Angie said of one herd of Jerseys they bought, "but you can always breed type into them much easier than production."

Don echoed Angie's opinion, saying, "You can breed type while you're getting a milk check."

With a herd average currently at 12,600 pounds of milk and goals to increase that to 14,000 pounds, the young couple can now breed for production and cull for type. This, as well as emphasizing the management details of their operation, should help them reach their production goal within the coming year.

"We feel that its very possible (to reach that goal)," Angie said, "if we get our act together for awhile."

Getting their act together involves serious decision making within the next couple of years, the couple confided. And careful decision-making is a management tool most farm families are learning to give more attention.



Where the farm operation is concerned, Don and Angie Koontz believe "the simpler, the better."

(Turn to Page A35)