

"Kids" outnumber cows on Ruth's dairy farm

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
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MOHRSVILLE — A new dairy operation is being assembled in Berks County. When completed it will feature a holding pen, milking parlor, automatic milkers, and a bulk tank. "Nothing new," you might say. Maybe not, until you see the work force behind the operation.

Ral-Anne Farm also features Anne Ruth and her two daughters, Stephanie and Sherry, handling many "kids." With their 30 plus does currently milking, the farm is home to over 80 Nubian, Saanen, and Recorded Grade goats. A goat admirer for over 11 years, Anne is quick to admit, "I never kept more than three or four goats until I met Ralph."

Ralph is Anne's husband. Widowed earlier in life, Anne met

Ralph at a technical school for horseshoeing.

"Horses were my first love," Anne says, adding that she and Ralph had much in common through their love of horses and various horse organizations.

But the time came when she had to tell him about her goats. "I didn't know how to tell him I had goats 'cause we met through the horse club," Anne states. "It turned out that he loved them. He's the one who talked me into this many," she says with a smile. "He just liked the size of the animal and the amount of milk that you got."

Originally from Bucks County, Anne told her future husband about her "kids" when she moved into Berks County and he was hauling her belongings here for her. "Ralph just fell in love with them," she adds. "I just kept them as a



The girls demonstrate how the kids follow them around. Sherry says that at times, they take all the goats for a walk with no ropes or halters.



"Jet" a milker under two years, recently won first place at the Blue Mountain Dairy Goat Show.

matter of course 'cause I had them so long."

Raising goats for over 11 years, Anne purchased her first one because of her son's many allergies. "Years back, a friend talked me into a goat," she says. "When we got the goat and started drinking the milk, the allergies stopped." "I bred the goat and one led to another, to another," she continues.

Today, her son lives away from home. But, Ralph's daughter, Stephanie and Anne's daughter, Sherry, both 16, remain a big influence in the goat dairy.

"They're part of the whole operation," Anne says about the two girls. Each daughter takes part in the daily chores and also does the showing when it comes time to exhibit "Ral-Anne" stock. While both girls admit that they do not always appreciate having to be home to do chores, they love the affection the goats return to them. While Stephanie looks forward to attending a business school after high school, Sherry says that she is "thinking about being a vet."

Anne is also quick to point out that they learned a lot about goats and goat milk since her early attempts with goats.

"Goat milk will draw odors in fast, so you must handle it quickly," she advises. "If you're clean about it, and it's cooled properly, it's very good."

Goat milk must be cooled very quickly. Currently Anne milks, strains the milk, immediately and then places it in the freezer to bring it to 32 degrees very quickly. She also prefers the Nubian breed of goat because their milk is much higher in butterfat and gives a better product.

At her present location for less



"Beth" gives Anne a kiss. Beth knows her name well and answers promptly every time she is called.

than two years, Anne says that one thing that prompted the dairy operation was the number of calls they got from people in the area who needed goat's milk because of allergies or stomach ulcers. The calls kept coming, "more than ever," Anne said so they decided to increase their herd and start a dairy operation.

When completed, the facility will slightly resemble a modern dairy barn with alterations for its smaller inhabitants. The holding pen is airy with screened windows and a step leading to a small door into the parlor. The milking parlor has feeders along the wall to accommodate four to five goats which will be milked from the back as they feed. The small stainless steel bucket milkers include two inflations about the same size as a cow's milker.

After the goats are milked, another door takes them back to their loose housing pens. From the floor of the parlor, another door leads to the milk house where the bulk tank is kept. Although very small by a dairyman's standards, the bulk tank and room must meet the same specifications as on a cow dairy. The walls are tiled and the sinks and equipment are all stainless steel.

Anne says that they have been working with state inspectors and are looking forward to becoming a raw milk dairy. They are also anxiously awaiting completion of their facilities so that hand milking is no longer necessary.

Although Ralph does not handle the goats very often, "he does the building, supplies the hay and grain and is a major part of cleanup," Anne says. Ralph holds a full-time job off the farm and has been building the dairy in his free time.

With a five month gestation period, goats can be compared to rabbits. "When you start out with one,..." Anne says with a smile.

The Ruth's have been raising all their does for the last several years to increase their herd. "Some of my best milkers are the ones that I raise myself," Anne says.

Although she likes the Nubian milk the best, Anne adds, "I like the Saanen as a breed. They're more mature."

The Ruth's are also working to upgrade their herd, a term which is referred to as "American," meaning three generations of purebred breedings. After three generations of this, a doe can be

(Turn to Page B3)



Currently all the goats at Ral-Anne Raw Milk Dairy are hand milked by Anne and her daughters. "It gives you muscles," Anne says.

Homestead Notes