

Young Ayrshire breeder looks to future with herd

BY BARBARA RADER
Staff Correspondent

LIGONIER — Lewis K. Thomas, a 26-year-old bachelor, doesn't really know why he started with Ayrshires but is certainly enthusiastic about his choice. "I guess I just liked the looks of them, and they're something different," he explained.

Graduating from Ligonier Valley High School in 1975, Lewis chose not to follow his father's footsteps in contracting but to take a stab at farming - dairy at that. Attending the Ponfeigh Farm Dispersal in Somerset County, he purchased two senior heifer calves which began the introduction of Ayrshires in a predominate Holstein county.

Wanting to add another open heifer, Lewis traveled to Indiana County to purchase an Ayrshire from Gary Kwisneck. In the spring of 1977, when all three of his heifers freshened, he again had to make another decision - should he stick to heifers or launch into a milking herd? He chose the latter.

Traveling to Carlisle to the Firecracker Sale, Lewis purchased two bred heifers and later six bred heifers at the Keystone Classic Sale in Harrisburg. Having support from his parents, George and Anna, he began farming the 70 acres at home and rented a barn with 14 stanchions where he milked his 11 original cows. Shipping milk in September 1977 was only the beginning, for in 1979 Lewis said, "I was milking 24 Ayrshires here and was out of room."

Lewis' parents, seeing their son's interest and the progress he had made, sought help from the Westmoreland County Extension

Agent in seeking an economical dairy barn and milking facilities. After traveling to several dairy farms within the county, Lewis, his dad and the Clay dealer sat down and drew up plans and came up with a set up which Lewis' dad built. (There is an advantage to having a dad as a contractor, Lewis confided).

Of the barn, Lewis said, "It is not a fancy barn - built for a nice set up with the cheapest route without cutting corners."

The finished barn measures 44 by 120 feet, containing 50 free stalls and a double-three Clay milking parlor with a Delaval milking system. Construction of the barn began in 1980, and the herd was moved to its new and permanent home in October of that year. Now, just four years later, the herd totals 51, with 37 milking cows.

The morning milking is done by Lewis, while one boy helps him with the evening milking. He employs three boys as his farm crew and adds, "they're really good help." Although not on test now, the herd had a rolling herd average of 11,000 pounds a year ago. Due to difficulties in not having a standard tester, Lewis dropped the program but hopes to be able to pick it up again in the near future.

Besides the acreage at the home farm, Lewis now rents another 100 acres for hay and pasture. He helps a neighbor with spring planting and for his work is given enough ear corn to feed his dry cows and fields to make hay. He buys from the local Agway a 16 percent ration pellet feed and milk replacer which is fed to the calves for six to 10 weeks, depending on



From the H-Bunk constructed in the center of his barn, Lewis Thomas looks over his herd of Ayrshires.

the growth of each individual calf.

Lewis pastures his cows during the night throughout the summer months. During the winter, the choice is up to the cows unless it is too cold or if weather conditions are not up-to-par. Sawdust is the only means of bedding in the free stalls, and the cows seem to keep relatively clean with the arrangement, Lewis said.

Housing all the dry cows at an additional farm, with some at another farm, leaves Lewis with only the milking cows at home. A contract agreement was established with Ed Johnston, who purchases the calves at two to three months of age, raises them until one month to six weeks before freshening and then sells them back to Lewis. All registration papers are retained by Lewis.

All the Ayrshires are registered, and Atlantic technicians do the

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Young dairyman Lewis Thomas, left, Ligonier, credits his parents, Anna and George Thomas, for their hand in helping him establish his farm.

Pa. Ayrshire Breeders hold annual field day

BY BARBARA RADER
Staff Correspondent

LIGONIER — Just outside of Ligonier, nestled in a quiet valley, was the site of the Pa. Ayrshire Field Day hosted by Lewis Thomas and his parents, George and Anna Thomas, on the Valley Furnace Farm July 28.

A 26-year-old dairyman, Thomas introduced Ayrshires on the nondairy farm in 1975 and added more to start shipping milk in 1977. Now, eight years later, the showcase farm provided an attractive setting for the breeders who traveled across the state to attend the Field Day.

Lewis said he had been approached two years ago to host the event, but decided to wait until he was more adjusted to his new facilities and until his herd was more established, thus assuring a worthwhile trip for the eastern breeders.

Westmoreland County Extension Agent Bill Kelly served as master of ceremonies and stressed the high accomplishments and capabilities of the young Thomas, who introduced a colored breed to the area.

Indiana County Extension Agent Eugene Schurman presented a morning program on "Milking Equipment Analysis," explaining that the milking equipment, from the milker itself to the components in the milk house, is most important on the dairy farm but is sometimes taken for granted. A tour was then conducted throughout the facilities constructed by George Thomas, a contractor, with the help of the county agent.

The afternoon speaker was Harry Roth from Atlantic

Breeder's Cooperative, Lancaster, who gave an update on the Ayrshire Young Sire Program. Roth also briefed the group on the

progress of the Ayrshire bulls and the breed.

National area field represen-

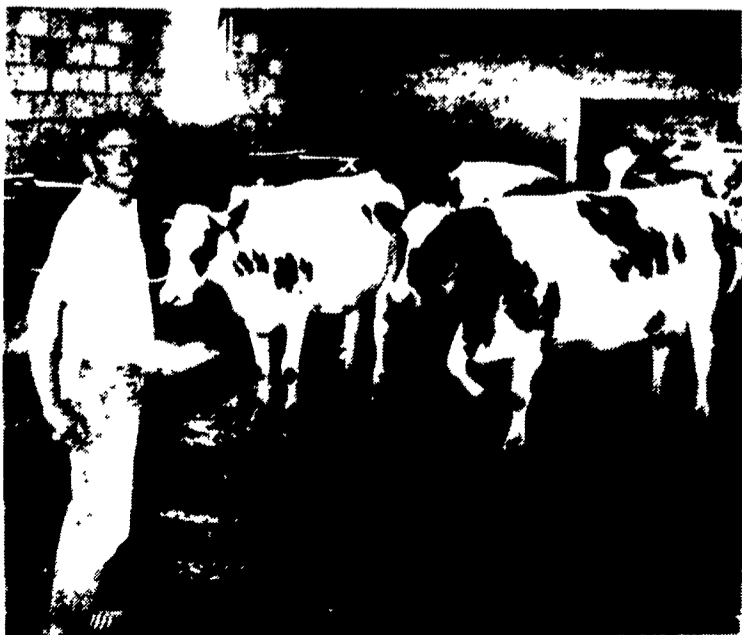
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Pa. Ayrshire Production Award winners attending the annual Ayrshire Field Day are, from left, George Seidel Sr., Harold and Susan Kulp and Charles Gable.



Ayrshire breeder Lewis Thomas, front, is flanked by his farm crew, from left, Ted Berkey, Scott Matson and Dale Shawley.



With room to house 50 cows, Lewis Thomas' newly built barn provides plenty of comfort.