

# Planning is a principle at Hoover Farms

BY WENDY WEHR

ANNVILLE—Efficiency, planning, and cooperation are watchwords for Abram Hoover and his sons. The combined dairy and beef operation on their farm in Lebanon County is the enterprise of Dale, Dean, and Reed Hoover, who have a three-man partnership, as well as their father Abram who contributes his advice and help at this stage.

Planning and cooperation are particularly evident in the development of this partnership arrangement. To understand the success of the Hoover family, one must probably understand the planning that led up to the current partnership of the Hoover brothers, Dale, Dean, and Reed.

The Hoover family has gone through a progression of partnership and work arrangements in the past 10 years, and all those changes have truly meant progress for the family.

Abram and Jean Hoover purchased their Lebanon County farm in 1963. As their children grew up, said Abram, they established an unwritten rule in their family. He explained that before joining a family partnership, any of their children who were interested in farming first had to work in the operation from three to five years.

"You cannot put compatibility down as an agreement on paper," remarked Abram Hoover, "that's something that has to be proven by experience."

So before Dale, the oldest brother, became a partner he worked for his dad for three years, and meanwhile Abram researched partnerships. Then, in 1978, a two-way partnership was established between Abram and Dale.

After five more years, when Dean and Reed worked on the farm and established their interest in the family operation, the second and current partnership was established. As of January 1, 1983,

Dale, Dean, and Reed set up a three-way partnership.

Their father stepped out of the official agreement, although he is still active in the farm operation, particularly with the steers, and is there when needed by his three sons.

The three brothers rent the land from their father and the machinery from the first partnership of their father and eldest brother. They farm 375 acres, with 275 of that put out in corn.

Although the arrangement may sound slightly confusing, it's based on a well-thought-out plan that seems to be working for the Hoovers. Each brother has his particular responsibilities, yet they all make major decisions together.

Youngest brother Reed is the herdsman, having chief responsibility for the day-to-day management of the 130 milking head. Dean manages the steer operation and also handles the feeding program for the cows. Dale is in charge of crops and machinery.

When asked how they decided who would do what, Dean remarked that each brother seemed to have a special interest or talent that just fitted into the needs of the operation. While earning his bachelor's degree in ag economics at Penn State, Dean did some studies on marketing beef, which was one reason he got into the steer operation.

Both Dale and his father emphasized, however, that they are thankful that the Lord has been so good to the family and given them the opportunity to be stewards of the land and its fruits.

Reed has the patience and interest needed to manage the 130-head dairy herd. His responsibilities include day-to-day record-keeping, which he describes as a bit confusing right

now because they have recently combined two herds into one at their main farm.

The Hoovers had had a second herd of cows on a rented farm, and when that farm was sold last winter they had a choice of selling that herd or adding it to their other herd. Because the dairy cow market was so poor, they decided to combine the two herds as of March 1.

With a 39-stanchion stall barn this meant changing cows three times during milking. So, they added a 24-stall addition to their barn this summer. Reed and his brothers have only been milking in it for about six weeks and are pleased so far with the change.

Their herd average stands at 18,000 lbs. milk and 690 lbs. fat with a 3.7 test. The original herd at the main farm is all registered Holsteins and the second herd is about ¼ grade animals. Reed says that they will eventually move to an all-registered combined herd, but some of the grade cows are still good producers.

There are three excellent cows in the Hoovers' Brook-Corner herd. Reed pointed out their top cow, Brook-Corner Glendell Venture, who in her four lactations to date has averaged 22,000 lbs. of milk.

They have recently flushed Venture and five pregnancies have resulted. They have contracts on two bull calves. Reed remarked that because the process is so expensive, it is really necessary to get those contracts.

Although they are striving to increase the herd average to 20,000 lbs., Reed says they're more concerned with improving type. "Feet and legs are probably our weakest point," says Reed, "although it's difficult to choose bulls for that characteristic." Reed also referred to the need to



Left to right are Dean, Abram, Reed, and Dale Hoover. Dean, Reed, and Dale are partners in a dairy and beef operation that was begun by their father, Abram.



Reed Hoover tries to convince Brook-Corner Glendell Venture to cooperate for the picture-taking session. Venture is the top cow in the Hoover herd.

"go along with the numbers game" when it comes to choosing popular bulls if they want to merchandise. They're using a lot of Chairman, Mars-Tony, Electra, Simon, and Columbus in breeding, but Reed noted that a lot of other bulls are used too, depending on the individual cow. Reed does some of the breeding himself, and a technician does the rest.

A few years ago they began a monthly herd check for fertility. Checking all the cows before breeding has improved their rate of conception.

The Hoovers raise nearly all of their own replacements, although Reed mentioned that they will buy a heifer occasionally since it's a chance to increase the quality of

the herd a little quicker.

The Hoovers have sold heifers the past two years, including 10 this year that were exported to Venezuela and Saudi Arabia.

Almost all of their heifers freshen out at two years or two years and one month. Reed remarked that they try not to shortchange the heifers on the feeding program so that they are good size when they are ready to calve.

The cows are fed a total mixed ration of haylage, high-moisture shelled corn, and corn silage, using a 13 percent concentrate. This ration is balanced for 55 lbs. production, and then the high

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Dale, oldest of the Hoover brothers, takes a break from working on the haybarn. He has primary responsibility for the crops and machinery.



The Hoover Farms of Anville, Lebanon County. The Hoovers recently built a 24-stall addition onto their barn to accommodate their 130-cow dairy herd.



Hoover Farms is a family operation, and Dale's wife and daughter, Charlotte and Alicia, share in the farm activities.