

# Brubaker dairy: A hilltop heritage

BY WENDY WEHR

MANHEIM — Heritage runs deep with the Harold Brubaker family. In the family and the farmland, and even in the dairy herd, there's a lot of history that gives the Brubaker dairy operation a strong foundation on which to grow and prosper in the future.

Harold and Virginia Brubaker and their son, Lowell, and his wife, Deb, run a 125-head dairy operation on a Lancaster County hilltop between Manheim and Mount Joy. They farm about 200 acres on three different farms, but the original "home place" where the Penn-Har-Va dairy is located goes back six generations in the Brubaker family.

Harold explained that the Brubaker farm, which lies off of Strickler Road, was originally part of a large tract of land owned by the Strickler family.

"In 1801 Peter Brubaker married a Strickler, and he farmed this place, although his wife still owned it, until she sold the farm to their son Henry. That was the first generation of Brubakers to hold title to the land," he noted.

Over the generations the land was passed on from father to son. In 1905 Harold's grandfather, Benjamin, acquired the place, and then in 1927 his son, or Harold's father, Levi took over. Harold bought the hilltop farm from his father in 1960.

Today, Harold and his son Lowell farm together, and it was with Lowell's increasing interest and involvement that the Brubaker family made the transition from

general farming to dairying.

They had raised everything from poultry to tomatoes and tobacco in the beginning, explained Harold, until in 1968 they eliminated the other crops and livestock and concentrated on dairying.

The 125 head of Holsteins that the Brubakers milk today are actually two herds in one. About 75 of the registered animals belong to Lowell and his wife, Deb, who have their own prefix, which is, very appropriately, Hilltop Heritage.

Nearly all of Lowell's herd comes from two calves that were given to him by his parents when he was a 4-H'er. "His first calf, Blackberry, was an Ivanhoe daughter that we gave him for Christmas," explained Virginia. Unfortunately, Blackberry took ill and died soon after she delivered her first calf, a heifer, but that was enough to get started.

The other calf was purchased by Harold for his son at a sale. Lowell remembers how as a 10-year-old at the sale he asked his father to buy the calf, and then couldn't believe that his dad actually had because she went for so much — \$300!

This calf did well for Lowell. She is the great grandmother of one of the best cows in the Brubaker herd now, Hilltop Heritage Pete Twila. The 3-year-old Pete daughter had a 23,000 pound record as a 2-year-old and is now working on another 23,000 pound milk record. She has

an Index of +1186.

Lowell mentioned that the bull studs have written several letters to him about Twila. The Brubakers have recently flushed her to Valiant and six pregnancies have resulted.

Harold gives his son a lot of credit for the herd that he's built up. "I gave him a good heifer to start, but it's his achievement," says Harold.

Although Harold and Lowell both clearly state that they work together totally in their dairy operation, Lowell does take a greater interest in the breeding program.

"I especially like tall cattle with really good udders," says Lowell. Right now they're using a lot of Valiant, Lime Hollow Elevation Mars, Mars-Tony, Sexation, Pete, and Bell in their breeding program.

"I have a keen interest in developing cattle with really good type," says Lowell. "I guess it really makes you feel like you've accomplished something."

In the Hilltop Heritage herd there are 15 VG's and 25 Good Plus cows. And there's also one Ex-91 cow, which is Deb Brubaker's addition to the herd.

Deb, who is the former Deb Miller and the 1974 Pa. State Dairy Princess, also comes from a dairy background. Her Excellent cow is an exception in one way though, and it's not because she is scored so highly. "Year after year I got only bull calves from my 4-H projects," says Deb. "This cow is the only heifer calf I ever had." So this is Deb's one contribution to the Hilltop Heritage herd.

Another outstanding cow in the herd who has a story behind her is "New Beginning," who won the grand championship in the dairy competition at the Manheim Farm Show last week. A wedding present from Deb's parents, New Beginning is a 22,000 pound producer.

Deb mentioned that a number of Lowell's friends have been asking him why they don't begin merchandising. Although he feels they are gradually working toward that, with the embryo transplant work that they are doing, for instance, they want to wait for the most appropriate time.

Their homebred herd has been growing in cow numbers as well as in production figures. Just five years ago the Brubakers were milking only about 80 cows. Lowell attributes the growth to good breeding and good care and management.

"When you've got sound type there aren't so many to cull. And I



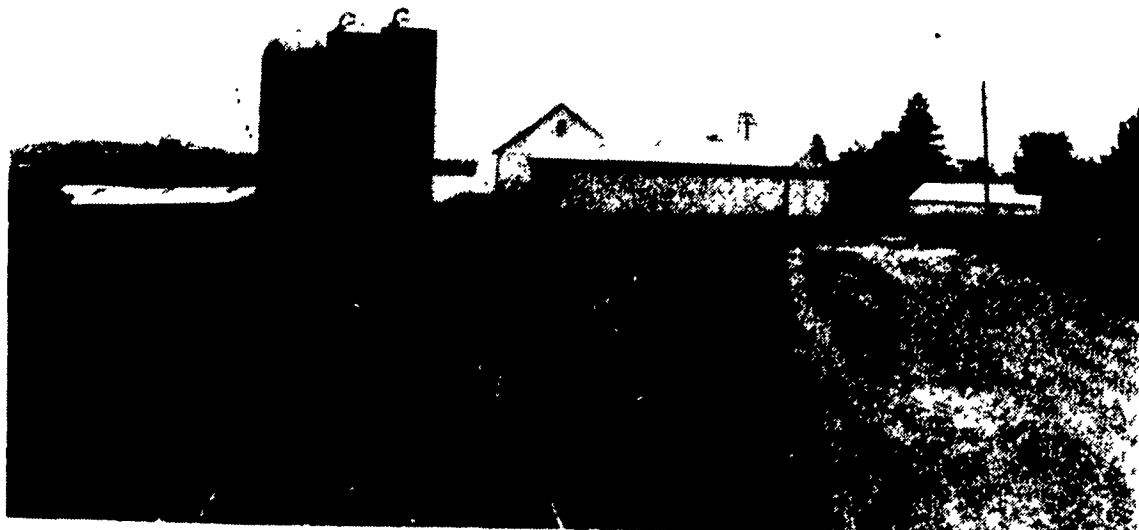
The Brubaker family. Harold and Virginia at left share the farming responsibilities with Deb and Lowell, right. Deb holds their three-month-old daughter Crystal while their older daughter, Heather, stands in front. Kneeling is Harold and Virginia's youngest daughter, Sharon.



To accommodate 125 milking head, the Brubakers have 94 tie stalls, pictured here, as well as 24 free stalls.



Harold and Lowell stand with one of Lowell's top cows, Hilltop Heritage Pete Twila, a 23,000 lb. producer. She's the great granddaughter of one of his original 4-H calves.



Harold and Virginia Brubaker's Penn-Har-Va farm stands on a hilltop between Manheim and Mt. Joy.

think cows last longer in a stall barn, too," comments Lowell. In their set-up at the home farm they have 94 tie stalls and 25 free stalls. Heifers are raised at one of the other places.

"We almost have too many here at home. We're looking forward to a better future for selling," says Lowell. He mentioned too that they're hoping that the heifer market will improve next spring with the end of the diversion program.

The rolling herd average of the Brubaker's 125 cows fluctuates around 17,000 pounds with a 3.5 test. They ship their milk to Inter-State.

It was only a few years ago that the Brubakers switched from bucket milkers to a pipeline system. Not only was the bucket milking back-breaking work, but the higher producing cows were overflowing the buckets.

"I guess we kept expanding until we hit our limit and then just had to put in a pipeline," comments Lowell.

Another fairly recent change for the Brubakers was the decision to start feeding high moisture corn three years ago. Along with the high moisture corn, they feed a 40 percent supplement, haylage and corn silage.

The corn silage and haylage is fed together at a bunk, and the high moisture corn and hay are fed in the barn.

Their farms provide the herd's haylage and silage needs, explains Harold, and they purchase about 10,000 bushels of corn in addition each year. Although their crops had adequate yields last year, the high price of corn was one result of the season's drought that did affect

them.

Harold noted that they paid out an extra \$20,000 over the year before to purchase grain. "This year should make up for last though," he says.

A future change that the Brubakers are already planning for is the installation of a manure handling system. Just this week they were discussing plans to install a manure pit in the spring.

With such a large herd, one might expect that the Brubakers hire extra help, but that's kept to a minimum with everyone pitching in to help with the work. Their only hired help is a boy who comes after school to help with the evening chores.

At milking time, two people, usually Harold and Lowell, milk with 10 units, and often Virginia washes off. With everyone's help they can milk over 100 head in one and a half hours.

Lowell describes his mother as "chief calf feeder," and another of Virginia's main responsibilities is keeping the books.

Lowell's sister Kris helps with the milking, too, and their other sister who is still at home, Sharon, helps out by babysitting for Lowell and Deb's children so Deb can help in a pinch in the barn as well.

Lowell and Deb's young family includes two daughters, Heather, age three and a half, and Crystal, who is just three months.

The young couple is optimistic about their future in the dairy industry, and Harold and Virginia seem pleased that they are carrying on the Brubaker farming tradition. No doubt at least part of their optimism has grown out of the "hilltop heritage" that is their foundation.