

Getting started in dairying without borrowed money

BY JOYCE BUDD
Staff Correspondent

NEW PARK — Yes, you can build a dairy barn without going into hock for life. Jim and Norma Warner, New Park R1, can vouch for that. They've done it.

Following their rigid, self-imposed philosophy of "don't buy it unless you have the money," the Warners two years ago saw a dream of some twenty years come true. They shipped their first milk from their first cows from their very own barn.

And they didn't go into debt one cent to build or equip it.

The Warners moved into their Hopewell Center Farm home when they married in October 1960. Jim's family were dairy and crop farmers, and he went into business with his father, Wilbur, and brother, William. The three still crop farm together, raising potatoes, corn and hay, but the partnership's herd of milk cows was dispersed in the last year.

Norma did volunteer work for awhile while raising their three youngsters, Francine, Todd and Tim. Then she worked for a period as a teachers' aide, and later spent six months on the night shift of a local manufacturer. But, that made it difficult to be available to take part in the growing number of FFA and 4-H activities with which sons Todd and Tim had become involved.

Plus, the dream of their own dairy herd, although dormant, had

never been forgotten. In 1981, when the boys' three registered Holstein project calves moved into their pens adjacent to the machine shed, the dream revitalized. With a trio of heifers that would freshen in a year, the Warners stepped up their survey of types of dairying barns and equipment and committed their family to the decision to dairy.

Of one thing they were absolutely certain: they would not go deeply in debt to do so. Jim would remain a part of the Warner family operation. Norma, and their youngest son Tim, would be the core of the home dairying team.

Knowing the types of supplies and equipment they'd eventually need, Norma and Jim began purchasing bargains, at close out sales in ag supply stores and through farm sales.

"I got a manure scraper for a quarter," Norma relates with a pleased grin. "We're still using it." Another time she came home with twenty-five-cent stainless steel balling guns, recognizing them as an item needed, but not precisely sure what for.

Floor drains for the milk house were found at an Agway close-out. A breeding wheel on sale was added to the growing collection.

As actual construction began, oak lumber cut from nearby woods became material for joists. Cement block seconds were located and hauled home for use in the walls. Jim turned up a supply of tile block overruns. Through



With a 40-head stall barn, built without borrowing and equipped by bargain hunting, Jim, Norma and Tim Warner are satisfied their decision to dairy was the right one.

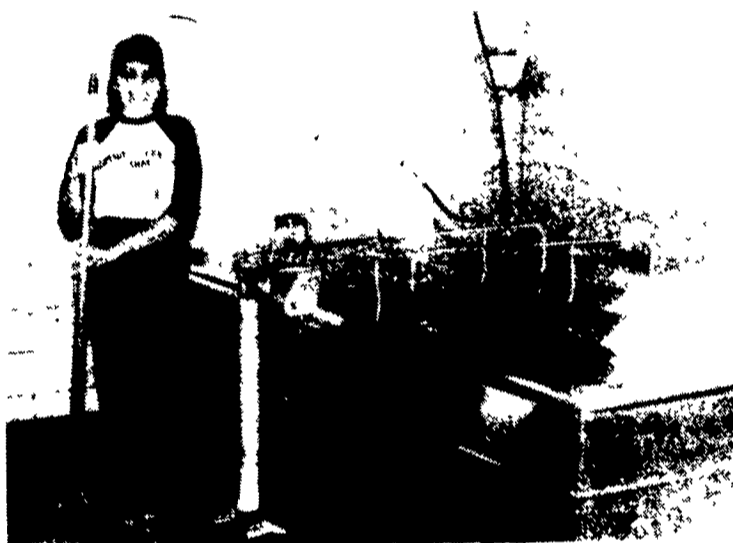
savvy shopping, he found new steel I-beams at a price cheaper than that quoted for used ones he'd been considering. Even the metal support beams for the barn were unearthed in a Lancaster junkyard.

Labor was hired for digging out the foundation and laying block, but relatives, friends and neighbors volunteered on a regular basis to complete most other construction details.

"I cooked for a lot of people on weekends," Norma remembers. They included Norma's parents, Francis and Mary Braun, their son-in-law Richard Seitz, Jr., and a good friend, Jim Loader, who showed up nearly every evening after work and supervised most of the construction. Jim's family lent a hand whenever possible, and his brother William handled evening milkings by himself as Jim needed time to help with the barn building. Their son, Todd, also took Jim's place to help milk at times.

Show-Ease stalls, windows and the materials for the upper parts and flooring of the barn were among the new items purchased. Electrical wiring, brand new hot on sale, was purchased ahead and held until needed.

The basic equipment in the barn—milkers, pipeline, tank—are all used. In fact, the tank they'd originally planned to buy wasn't available when the Warners were ready to ship milk. Norma happened to see a 400-gallon Girton at a farm sale, had it checked to be



Savvy shopper Norma Warner scouted well ahead of time for items she knew the family would need to start dairying on their own. Among her "buys" were a 25-cent manure scraper and the \$250 tank.

sure it was operating properly, and paid \$250 for it. It's still cooling milk in the milkhouse.

"We started with three cows," she says. For the first many months, they milked eight head, generally increasing to 20 as they could afford to add cows.

Herd size has since grown to 25, and the production is climbing, at an average now of 52 pounds per day, with a rolling herd average projected by the end of the year to over 15,000. Test gets careful scrutiny, and one particular milker is a five-percent-fat tester.

"We don't want any more than 30, so we must keep high producers to keep it going," Jim emphasizes. "No freeloaders."

He milks in the morning, with Tim sometimes crawling out of bed early to lend a hand before heading off to his seventh grade classes at Southeastern Middle School. Tim and assistant Randy McKee generally handle the evening milking, and sometimes Norma's sister Renee helps. Feeding is all done by Norma, who also handles daily clean up and oversees records.

Feed for the herd is purchased from the Warner family partnership. Most replacements are raised, with a dozen yearlings and 17 calves in the heifer pen addition to the farm machine shed.

When the Warners determined that they would have to have a tractor, they sold the family's camper to purchase a Massey 235 model. Later, as finances allowed, a manure spreader was added. Prior to that, they had borrowed a tractor and spreader from the family business for hauling chores.

As the herd production and milkcheck have increased, a

combination feed and hay wagon, and a silo unloader have been added to the equipment line. And, although she searched diligently for quite awhile for a used barn cleaner, Norma never did find what she needed. Careful budgeting just allowed for a purchase of a new one.

"We were both brought up, all our lives, to think about things before we buy them" both agree.

"And I count a lot on God," Norma quickly adds.

Son Todd is currently employed off the farm at Tri-Boro Concrete but Tim already plans to be the next Warner dairyman. Active in dairy judging, dairy bowl and 4-H exhibiting, he will join the Kennard-Dale FFA chapter as a high school freshman.

Jim is a former American Farmer degree winner, and he and the whole family continue as strong FFA supporters, and chaperone and serve as advisors for various activities. Both he and Norma have honorary chapter degrees and Jim was recently chosen the Kennard-Dale FFA distinguished service award winner. One of the chapter's dairy calf chain heifers was donated by Tim.

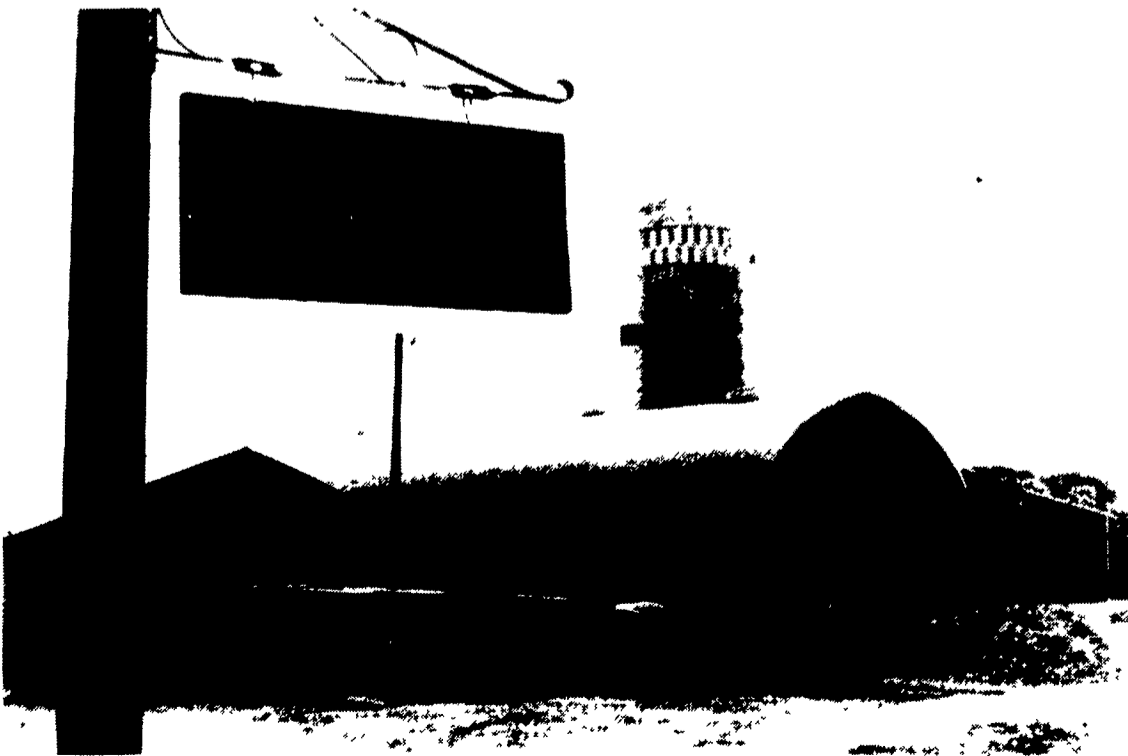
Their camper is no longer available for family outings, but 4-H FFA and Holstein events instead keep their schedules full. And, evenings after the milking chores are finished, Tim and his mom often go fishing until dark.

"This is something we've thought about ever since we were first married," agree the Warner couple.

"We all work together."
"And we don't buy something unless we can pay for it."



Their sons' interest in dairy projects was a contributing factor in Warners commitment to build their new barn. This Jersey heifer being haltered by Tim and Jim and is the latest 4-H exhibit addition.



Although the Warners have lived on their Hopewell Center farm for twenty years, it got a new look three years ago when they added the hip-roofed, tie-stall milking barn.