

# Vista Grande Holsteins -- doing a better job

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**FLEETWOOD** — Efficient and progressive dairymen, committed to their profession are needed across the country with the dairy economy so uncertain. Vista Grande Holsteins, owned by Joseph Ruth and David Bitler, Berks County, illustrate what can be accomplished through sound decisions and careful management.

Young dairymen with a good start in farming, Ruth and Bitler try to be optimistic about the future. "You're always going to need milk," Bitler states. Joe Ruth admits, "It doesn't look like dairying is going to be too prosperous for the next few years."

But, Ruth is quick to point out, "hard work" is a vital part of their formula for success. "We rely on common sense more than anything else," he says. As for dealing with the future, Ruth adds, "We won't increase anything...and won't spend money unless we have to." Bitler adds, "We'll just try to do a better job."

A "better job" could be the motto at Vista Grande Farm where a 90 cow registered Holstein herd has been managed by the Ruth-Bitler partnership since 1979.

The very beginnings of the current Vista Grande spread started in 1937 when Alpheus Ruth, current president of Lehigh Valley Farmers, established his registered Holstein herd on the

Fleetwood farm. The entire herd, with the exception of a few animals bought by Dave and Phoebe Ruth, can be traced to one cow, Greenwood Dean Bobby of Dunloogin breeding.

This cow had seven sets of twins. Six of the sets were twin heifers, and formed the foundation of the current herd. Years later, in 1975, a partnership was formed between Ruth and his son Joseph.

Management of the 163 acre homestead changed again in 1979. Phoebe, Ruth's daughter, and her husband, David Bitler, sold their dairy herd in Lancaster County to take up the partnership with Joseph after the elder Ruth retired from farming.

Today over 300 acres are farmed by the Ruth-Bitler family team, and 80 plus cows are milked in a spacious stanchion barn. Although Bitler manages the dairy herd and Ruth oversees crop management, duties are shared and only seasonal employees are needed.

Two people complete the milking duties using six milking units on a pipeline system. Most crop production and harvesting is also done by the team with a minimum of custom work hired.

The rolling herd average has been increasing yearly and currently stands at 19,043M, 780F and 3.7 percent on 93 cows. "I spend more time with the cows," Bitler confesses, but contributes the biggest asset as the ability to



The work force behind the successful operation of Vista Grande Holsteins stand around the farm sign. The two family partnerships include: on left, Joseph Ruth and his wife, Joanne, and children, Krista, and Kent. On the right stand David Bitler, and wife, Phoebe, with son, Jesse.

grow better replacement heifers.

"Raising heifers better, giving them a better chance...I contribute that as one of the biggest benefits for the herd," Bitler reiterates. "I don't know what we did before we had the VPI barn," he adds, as he explains the grouping method on the farm. Built in 1981, the VPI barn has proved a valuable tool for raising replacement stock.

Calves are started in hutches, weaned at eight weeks, then moved to super hutches in same-size groups. As the growth rate improves, heifers are grouped in the VPI barn. At ten months to one year of age, or equal size, heifers are moved to a freestall barn to await breeding and entering the milking string.

In complete charge of the calves, Phoebe Bitler states that much of her calf raising success stems from "the same person feeding calves all the time." Calves are watched closely, fed antibiotic milk or milk replacer, and weaned and grouped as growth dictates.

Calfhood vaccinations and wormings are also part of the calf program. Calves are bucket fed milk to discourage sucking and amply bedded with straw at all times.

A total mixed ration is used throughout the barns for the stock. Bitler relates that he just changed the feeding program for the milking string to feed for a high producing group and a low producing group. "Now I feed for a 50 pound cow and 75 pound cow," he explains.

Production is climbing since the TMR milking ration was adjusted and was proven by the last DHIA test when 15 cows produced over 100 pounds of milk a day.

The milking string is fed the TMR twice a day along with a top dress supplement and dry hay at night. High moisture shelled corn, roasted crimped soybeans, alfalfa haylage, and corn silage form the basis of the ration.

Separate rations are formulated by Bitler for the dry cow group and the young stock group. These rations are then fed accordingly. Dry cows receive hay, free choice, and a grain mix concentrated with oats in addition to corn silage. Bitler also custom mixes his own calf grower.

Feeding roasted soybeans in the ration is "one of the best things we've done," according to Bitler. It has saved a lot of feed costs for the partnership and also gave



Dave Bitler stands by Pen-Col Apollo Bethany, a cow developed at Vista Grande. An 85 point Hilltop Apollo, Bethany milked over 150 pounds on the last test, making it her third test since freshening of over 100 pounds. She has a record of 20,000+ pounds milk with a 4% test to her credit at five years and nine months of age.

them a big fertilizer advantage by putting nitrogen back in the ground, Ruth states. Ruth rotates corn and soybeans to gain this advantage.

Crop management at Vista Grande involves rotating crops and growing what is needed for the dairy herd and young stock. Not necessarily pushing for the top crop production because of the added costs involved.

Ruth explains that he plant according to what is practical and efficient for the farm. "I don't believe in borrowing money to put a crop out," he states. He explains that there are always alternative ways to grow what the farm needs without going into debt to gain the biggest harvest.

Corn, alfalfa, and soybeans are the main crops on the 380 acres of owned and rented farmland. Oats and wheat are also grown and rotated to save on fertilizer costs.

Forage quality has also been increasing over the years due to Ruth's crop management, according to Bitler. With this type of careful management, Vista Grande cows are pumping out noteworthy records. On the last test, a two year old Chairman daughter recorded 92 pounds.

The partnership is also proud of Pen-Col Apollo Bethany, an 85 point Hilltop Apollo daughter who just tested 151.5 pounds. "Bethany", a six year old, was purchased as a young animal and developed at Vista Grande.

She boasts a five year old record of 28,387M, 1149F and 4.0 percent. She has also produced a Valient daughter who is sparking outside interest with her two year record of 20,000 plus and a 4.5 percent test. "Valient Buffy" is due in March to Bova.

"I try to be mindful of test

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Jesse helps to keep things clean at Vista Grande.



Phoebe Bitler has complete care of the calves at Vista Grande. Much of her success she attributes to being the only calf feeder all the time.