

Young dairyman captures top place in Schuylkill County DHIA

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ANDREAS — Dedication to learning from listening and reading, a gradual start in the dairy business, and a farm in the midst of "family", are the secrets of success behind Schuylkill County's highest producing herd. Owned by Brian and Brenda Ruch, with their two year old son, Aaron, Andreas, their herd of 31 registered and grade Holsteins pumped out an average of 21,843 pounds of milk, 3.8% fat, and 838 pounds of fat with a 3.2% protein, to top the county list for 1985.

"It was a long way up," confesses Brian Ruch. The 25 year old dairyman always had the "intention of dairying" and used his years of working for other dairymen as his "school" for his future dairy herd. "Talking to people costs you next to nothing," Ruch continued. He states that he also reads extensively and looks for dairy informational articles in magazines and newspapers.

Born into a family of crop farmers, Ruch worked for dairy farmers whenever he could. He also adds that he learned a lot working as a milk tester for two years. "It was a great experience," he explains. "You saw what worked and what didn't," he continued.

"I learned that you had to treat each cow as an individual, not as a herd," Ruch says. It is a concept that he has tried to carry out in his own herd.

Cows are fed grain two times a day, hay is fed three times a day, and silage goes in the manger

three times a day. "I was sort of skimpy at first," he explains about his initial feeding programs. "You've got to keep a cow full all the time for her to milk really good," he explains.

Ruch begins the day by feeding his cows a "real good quality timothy hay." "Then you can see if a cow is off," he adds. According to the young dairyman, this also helps keep his butterfat levels up by putting hay into the cow first. He follows this feeding with his grain, silage, and alfalfa hay feeding throughout the day. The silage and some of the hay are grown on his farm. The grain mix consists of a ground corn mix with a 32% supplement added to it.

"Treating each cow as an individual" is carried through in his breeding program too. "The way I do it," Ruch explains, "I use the red book." "I look at what the cow needs. I start at the top of the TPI list and I eliminate one at a time," he states. "I try to match all the weaknesses of a cow to the strengths of a bull." Ruch breeds his own cows and stays with the top bulls of the breed. "It doesn't pay to breed to average," he adds.

The results of Ruch's ways of thinking are obvious when considering that his start in the dairy business began with the random purchase of grade heifer calves to raise in his parent's barn over seven years ago.

"I raised heifer calves with the intentions of getting started (in dairying) someday," Ruch says. He mainly purchased calves or bred heifers because of the "longer life ahead of them," and "the

chance of getting a real good one for market price," he said.

It was January, 1981, that Ruch began renting his current farm. He states that it was by "accident" that he found this barn that was going to be empty. Within two days, Ruch and his ten milking animals and approximately 15 heifers that he had collected over the years, moved into their present facilities.

Since he was an owner-sampler at his parent's farm from the start of each animal's lactations, Ruch was able to go on official test at his new farm. He also began purchasing additional milking animals. His herd average at that time ranged at 14,862 pounds milk with a 3.9% fat test. He tried to purchase registered animals whenever possible and currently only several grades remain of that first herd. Grade heifers are now raised and sold when fresh.

Ruch purchased this same farm in 1985 when the estate decided to sell. "I really didn't know where else to go," he adds, saying that he liked this location. The farm consists of 60 tillable acres and pastures for summer grazing.

This self-described "cow person" does not own any machinery and custom hires whatever he needs. The stanchion barn houses the 30 plus milkers and bred heifers, and calves are raised in hutches.

Before the purchase of the farm, ag bags were used for three years for silage preservation. Pleased with their performance, but not appreciative of all the shoveling involved, Ruch needed a silo on the farm. Lenders understood the need for labor efficiency in the one-man operation and a silo was constructed after the farm was purchased.

Ruch states that his lenders were impressed with his management when they reviewed his renting years. "They saw what we could do," he says. Ruch works closely with his lenders and closely manages his debt.

Cows were also culled hard in his first few years to keep production efficient, according to Ruch. Calving intervals are also watched closely. "That's something that's real important to me - calving interval," Ruch states. "I hate to see a cow stand open too long," he adds.

Ruch starts breeding back at 60 days with an average producer and at 90 days with a high producer. "It really impresses me to have a cow



Brian and Brenda Ruch with their son, Aaron, stand with Sherry, a favorite producer at Ruch's farm.

freshen the same time every year," he adds.

A favorite cow of Ruch's is Village Jetstream Sherry, a VG-87, seven year old, purchased as a calf. One of Ruch's 4-H animals, Sherry was "shown with not much success." "The judges said she wouldn't turn out to be much of a cow," Ruch relates. Sherry is currently on her fourth lactation over 24,000 pounds and now is projected to 26,268M and 849F at seven years.

Giving him twins almost every year, Sherry has produced a well-liked daughter. "Sugar", a VG Gemini daughter is Ruch's 864 fat at four years and eight months of age.

Another member of this family is Sugar's daughter, Sammy Jo, who scored 84 as a two year old. A daughter of Chairman, Sammy Jo completed 18,151 milk with a 3.5% test at two years of age. "I'm proud of her. I think she is going to do things," he adds.

A "real milk cow" according to Ruch, is Marcie, a Trump daughter. Purchased as a fresh

heifer, Marcie is fresh again at five years and three months and has three tests over 130 pounds to her credit. She has a completed lactation at 4-03 of 29,499M, 3.6% and 1050F.

"I'm always trying to breed for better cows," Ruch says, "Especially on the type end of it," he concludes. He looks forward to a better genetic herd in the future.

The factor that has contributed most to Ruch's success, according to this modest dairyman, has been the support of his family around him. "I live in a good area," he repeats. "Everybody lives in the neighborhood (his family)," he continues. "It's important when you're by yourself," he explains. "Take the other morning...the heifers were out. I made a call and I had help," Ruch says. This type of help is greatly appreciated, the young dairyman points out.

With this modest start in dairying and the determination to "breed better", Ruch has proven that there still is room for young dairymen in today's dairy industry.



Brenda and Aaron Ruch do the feeding chores at the calf hutches.



The Ruch farm is a well kept, modest farm along Rt. 895 in Schuylkill County. It is home to the highest producing herd in Schuylkill County.



Four attend potato meet

Several potato growers from Pennsylvania attended the 37th Annual Meeting of the National Potato Council, held recently in New Orleans. Pictured are Noah Kreider, Manheim; George Wolf, Stewartstown; Keith Masser, Sacramento and Robert Harwood, Wattsburg.

Sprayer workshop

NEWARK, DE — A workshop to help farmers gear up their sprayers for the coming season will be held Wednesday, March 26, at the University of Delaware's Research and Education Center (formerly the substation) on U.S. Route 9 southwest of Georgetown.

The program, which is being sponsored by the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service, will start at 1 p.m. (rain or shine) in the meeting room and will end by 4:30 p.m. Depending on the weather, part of the workshop will take place outdoors or in a farm shed.

Topics to be covered will include: nozzle selection, ground driven applicator pump maintenance, drift reduction, safety equipment and sprayer modifications. There will be a

demonstration of different nozzle setups and the resulting spray pattern uniformity. Another demonstration will cover boom sprayer calibration using both PTO and ground driven pumps.

Commercial pesticide applicators can earn three credit hours toward recertification in category 1-A (agricultural plant) and category 3 (ornamentals and turf) by attending this workshop.

Extension agricultural engineer Tom Williams says the workshop is designed to show farmers how to get the most from their pesticides. He suggests they bring pocket calculators to use in working through examples on nozzle selection and calibration. Participants will receive extension publications and nozzle catalogs.