

Masonic Homes

Their herd comes doctor recommended

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ELIZABETHTOWN

Traveling around Masonic Homes gives the impression of stepping back in time. The rolling hillsides, picturesque gardens and stone buildings are reminiscent of an earlier time when cows were hand milked and surplus production was unheard of.

It was in this earlier time that the Masonic Homes Ayrshires originated. In 1913, shortly after the Homes opened their doors, they started the registered Ayrshire herd that is now recognized as one of the herds in the state.

Ayrshire was the breed of choice for Masonic Homes due to the characteristic small fat globules found in their milk. This trait made the milk easier to digest and it was considered ideal for the older resident at the Homes by doctors at the time.

The Freemasons purchased nearly 1,700 acres in 1908 near Elizabethtown. Here they established and have continually operated a home for elderly Freemasons, their wives, widows and children.

"The farms serve as a support function, providing foodstuffs and the aesthetics of good open surroundings for the Homes," Gerald Tracy, general farm manager of Masonic Homes Farm said. "A large portion of what is produced here is consumed here," Tracy continued.

Masonic Homes is divided into eight different production centers;

dairy, beef, poultry, swine, orchards, vegetables, crops and landscaping. Each production area has a budget and is responsible for producing a product in a competitive manner.

Each area also has a full time supervisor who watches the cost of production closely Tracy explained. These supervisor do not work eight to five and are available when the animals are in need, including late in the evening.

The supervisor for the dairy, Albert "Barney" Wilson, also serves as the assistant general farm manager. Wilson closely watches this outstanding herd to keep their production up to its current level. These cows have been under his exclusive care for 16 years, and he has worked full-time at the Homes for the past 31 years.

The bulk of this herd is housed in a modern freestall barn. A maternity barn, three heifer barns, a conventional tie stall barn, and a bull barn are also used to provide the optimum care and attention possible.

Older cows that require a greater amount of attention and first calf heifers that have recently calved are housed in a single row stanchion barn.

These cows are fed hay and corn silage which is top dressed with a custom blended grain ration. The forages are routinely tested and the grain mix is then balanced accordingly. A TMR feeding program is used in the bunk of the



The main barn at Masonic Homes houses the milking herd and young calves. This pasture is used for the older cows requiring more attention and first calf heifers.

freestall barn.

A tie stall barn, which is adjacent to the freestall barn, is used to milk. The herd is grouped into a high and low production group and fed accordingly.

The dry cows are fed a separate ration until about two weeks prior to calving. At this point they are moved to the maternity pens where their feed is gradually adjusted to the ration fed to the milking string.

Feeding the dry cows like this "has eliminated many problems for us," Wilson noted. Mastitis was virtually eliminated by treating the udder when the cows are dried off, Wilson added.

With the maternity pens the cows can be watched closely since farm personnel frequently travel through the stanchion barn where the pens are located. The success of these pens is illustrated by their low calf mortality rate.

"In 16 years we haven't lost a calf after it has been taken off the cow," Wilson noted.

The calves are raised in three age groups in three separate barns. They are bred either by natural services or through A.I., depending on the type of mating Wilson is looking to make. Since the heifer facilities are not geared to restraining them for A.I., the natural service is more convenient method in the heifer barn.

All of the bulls used at Masonic Homes are registered, and not just kept to settle hard breeders Tracy explained.

One of the bull presently on the farm is Cove Creek Sampson, purchased from the Sam Diehl herd in Bedford. His daughters are currently in their second lactation and are doing very well according to Wilson.

They support the Pennsylvania young sire program by using these bulls that are housed at a nearby A.I. stud. They have also assisted by housing a sire in waiting for the program.

To achieve a better outcrossing of their bloodlines, Wilson uses many Canadian bulls in his breeding program.

The Hi-Kick bull, who was developed at Masonic Homes, has produced the most productive cow families, Wilson proudly explained. Convention tour visitors will have the opportunity to view offspring of the various bulls used at the Homes. Wilson plans to have two daughters of the main bulls they have used over the years on display.

Masonic Homes breeding and feeding program has produced a herd that has a mature equivalent with twice a day milking of 14,585 pounds of milk, 576 pounds of fat, and 475 pounds of protein on 120 milking cows.

The herd is kept on this schedule of production with two veterinarians. One is a reproduction specialist who visits



Albert "Barney" Wilson proudly looks over the newborn calf from the Canadian bull Amigo. The dam "Rachael" was sired by Cove Creek Sampson, a registered bull owned by Masonic Homes.

every two weeks to check on pregnancies. With these frequent visits he can quickly detect any reproduction abnormalities before they develop into severe problems.

An animal health vet is employed as needed and to handle such duties as testing and vaccinations. Two years ago they added vaccinating against rabies to this schedule as a precaution. When they started this program, rabies outbreaks were occurring with regularity in the area.

This herd can proudly report that they have always been certified and accredited.

Any herd that has withstood the test of time and prospered is doing things correctly and moving in the right direction. The combination of the various management practices at Masonic Homes has produced a herd that "speaks for itself by doing well for others," Tracy said.

"We normally don't advertise other than in connection with sales since we are here to serve the guests," Tracy continued. Every

year they sell animals to 4-Hers, FFAers and other Ayrshire enthusiasts who have learned about this herd by word of mouth.

The National Sale on Friday April 25 features Masonic Homes C.C.S. Neat. This two year old consignment was sired by Cove Creek Sampson and her dam produced over 16,000 of 4.2 percent milk as a two year old.

This farm, while unique in its surroundings, stone buildings, diversified productions centers, and as a showplace for the many visitors that pass through its gates, has the same goals as any other commercial dairy operation. It is constantly evaluating and making appropriate changes to continually improve.

Convention goers will find many appealing things at Masonic Homes Farm, from the aesthetics of the landscapes to the beauty of the stylish cows, that will provide fuel for conversation through the remainder of their trip.



Turn of the century stonework is illustrated on the creamery which has been converted to the milkhouse.



Calves are grouped by age at Masonic Homes and housed at three barns.



The bull barn (left) is home to three registered sires used at the Homes. Directly behind this is the dry cow barn and exercise lot.