

Maryland Eastern Shore welcomes York Holstein tour

BY JOYCE BUPP
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EASTERN SHORE, MD — York County Holstein breeders took a "busman's holiday" April 9, visiting four Maryland dairying operations for their annual spring farm tour.

Three of the four stops were at the diversified setups of Fair Hill Farms, near Chestertown. Fair Hill began operations on Eastern Shore in 1960, when the Ed Fry family moved across the Chesapeake Bay from Montgomery County.

Largest of the Fry family's three operations is Fair Hill Dairy, where 540 head are milked three times daily. The "home farm" still maintains a herd of 60 head, while another 60 investor animals are handled at the Churn Creek leased facility.

All three herds are included together for DHIA purposes, with a total of 758 head on the March test, with a rolling herd average of over 19,600 of milk and 700-plus fat. With replacements, Fair Hill totals some 1500 head of cattle, three-quarters of them registered.

While milk production efficiency earns top attention at Fair Hill, type is not slighted. The most recent classification, in March, resulted in 26 Excellents, 150 Very Goods, 162 Good Plus, and 133 Goods. Classification average on the 469 head scored was 82.4, for a BAA of 103.4.

Host and tour guide for the visit was Ed Fry, Jr., who along with his father and brother operates Fair Hill Farms, Inc. A third brother in an area veterinarian.

Fair Hill Dairy, the large commercial-type facility, with its more than 500 milking animals, was built in 1980 by Agri, Inc. of Ephrata.

"Feeding, breeding, and milking cows is the objective here," says Fry. Emphasis has always been on efficiency, and the facility was designed to maximize cow flow and minimize handling. A staff of eight maintains operations at the

large dairy, with a total Fair Hill staff of 35, including a 4-man construction crew and two office employees.

The double-ten parlor is in use 22 hours per day, with one milker handling each of the shifts. A spray wash system in the large holding area preps cows prior to milking, and udders on all but the first few in each group are air-dried by their turn in the parlor.

Manure is flushed from the holding and free stall areas with recycled water held in 30,000 gallon tanks. Flush water in turn is caught in a storage lagoon and recycled onto the crop ground. Other energy-savings come from well-water tube cooling of milk and equipment heat recovery systems efficient enough to allow total hot water needs of the dairy to be handled through a 120-gallon water heater.

All health and reproductive work on the herd is handled in a lockup stanchion area, and a hospital area includes manger lockups. A Delvo test for antibiotic contamination is run on every treated animal before she is removed from the treated group. Every tank of milk is also Delvo checked before being loaded on the farm's transport tanker.

Cows at the large dairy are grouped by production, with the high group averaging 135 pounds/day. Second herd averages 92 pounds, third group is at 72 pounds, and the 2-year-old group of 130 head is averaging 67 pounds. One two-year-old topping the group milked 110 pounds in just her second month of production.

Roger McKnight, herd manager, is the nutrition specialist, utilizing a computer to keep rations fine-tuned for each production grouping. The Total Mixed Ration is based on an 80 percent corn silage and 20 percent haylage blend, with roasted beans and ground barley.

"We go for the 'best cost' ration, not necessarily the 'least cost,'" stressed McKnight. Cottonseed, distillers grain or soy hulls may

also be integrated in the ration, depending on commodity markets. Bunker silos and a commodity shed allow for volume handling of feedstuffs. Minerals are custom formulated, including the use of chelated types.

McKnight is sold on the benefits of barley in the ration over the traditional use of corn.

"We stay away from using too much starch from the same feed source," he elaborated. "Every time we go to using shelled corn we see a drop in production." Because cows in the Fair Hill Dairy herd are under heavy production stress, McKnight keeps ration levels of beans and fats higher than is usually recommended by nutritionists.

About three years ago, he tried to obtain a supply of an isoacid milk booster additive, but was unable to find a source. So, McKnight developed his own blend, and dubbed it "Bio Boost." He's now marketing the product in selected areas, and acknowledges that the production booster is working.

Results in the herds he's been working with show production increases of 3-5 pounds per cow, usually in three weeks or less, at a cost of about twenty cents per cow per day. McKnight attributes the performance of the production boosting product to an increase in the saliva production in the cow's mouth, which in turn carries through the digestive process to more efficiently utilize the feed nutrients.

The lack of grain and decrease in forage particle size in manure attests to that theory. In addition, McKnight sees the isoacid product also working as a preservative for feedstuffs, allowing forages to remain palatable for a longer period of time once they are exposed to air.

Crop production includes 3600 acres, about 40 percent of that to supply herd feedstuffs, and the remaining for diversified grain production.

The sixty head herd at the Fair Hill home farm are milked twice daily in a double-four parlor. All cows for the farm complex are calved out at this facility, between 60 to 85 head monthly.

Hutches, up to 75 in use at a time, house baby calves until weaning, when they are grouped and held until about fourteen weeks of age. A custom raiser then takes over calves, until they are returned for breeding, either by A.I. or as embryo transfer recipients. Once bred, heifers again go to a custom raiser.

Transfer work plays a large part in Fair Hill's merchandising program with about 200 E.T.'s done annually. All ET work is by fresh transfer, and non-surgical implantation. High pedigreed virgin heifers are often flushed, and up to forty percent of the total ET recipients are mature cows



Pintail Point, near Queenstown, is owned by Baltimore automobile executive Louis Schaefer. The farm is located on a point of land projecting into the Wye River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay.



Tall, typey cows, with impressive udders, and housed in a spotless, airy, tie-stall barn, greet visitors to Pintail Point.

from the Fair Hill Dairy.

High indexed Excellent and Very Good individuals comprise a group bred to high TPI sires, with the aim of continuing and building "numbers." A second breeding group includes good type cows with indexes of \$35 and under. Sires are selected to improve type and build indexes in succeeding generations.

A third group is comprised of Good Plus and Good individuals, below herd scoring averages, but the "bread and butter" producers of the herd. Established sires whose popularity has lessened are crossed to this grouping.

Remaining cattle not meeting the above standards are bred to young sires, if offspring are wanted for replacements, or used as transfer recipients.

Fair Hill's "elite" cows are kept at the leased Churn Creek barn, which houses 54 head of top-indexed, pedigreed investor animals. Four individuals are contracted for foreign frozen ET sales, and ten either already have or have potential for sons in AI organizations.

Final visit was to a new Eastern Shore establishment, still in the process of building a herd of high type, production and index cattle.

Pintail Point Farms is located near Queenstown, on a point of land projecting out into the Wye River, which flows into the

Chesapeake Bay. The farm was acquired some years ago by Baltimore automobile dealership owner Louis M. Schaefer, as a hunting and fishing getaway. In fact, the farm's name comes from the Pintail ducks which frequent the waters of the Wye.

Schaefer felt the dairy barn on the property should be utilized, and purchased a small commercial herd. After becoming interested in purebred cattle, he chose to instead begin establishing a top herd of registered stock. Walter Johnson, a former purebred Guernsey breeder, and his wife Carol, who grew up with registered Holsteins, were hired to put together and manage a new Pintail Point herd. Two additional full-time employees complete the staff.

In January of 1985, construction crews began remodeling the old facility. On Christmas Eve the herd was moved into a new tiestall barn, complete with paneled office and board room amenities.

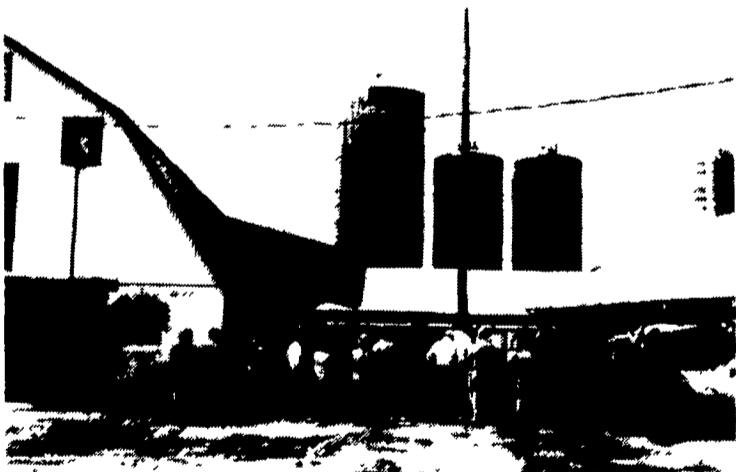
Goal is a herd of 70 head, with 45 currently in the milking string. Foundation Holstein stock has been acquired from various state and national sales, Fair Hill Farms and 21 head of high indexed individuals at the November Kingstead Farms dispersal.

Breeding program at Pintail Point focuses on crossing to strengthen individual cow weaknesses, while selecting traits that will fit anticipated future industry markets for fat and protein.

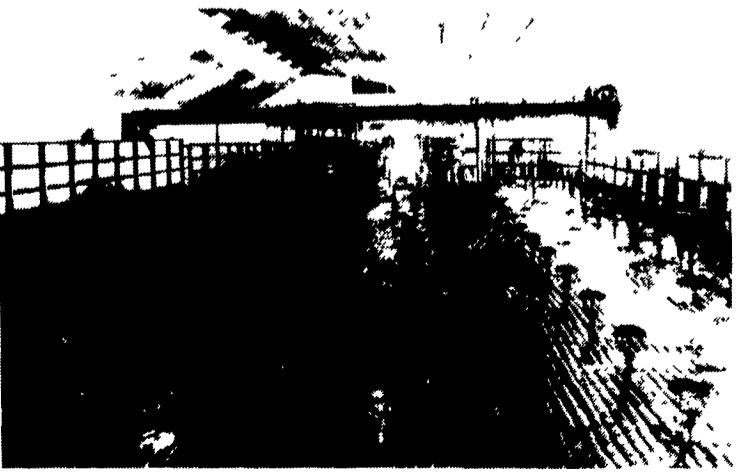
"We're shooting for a four percent test and higher protein," affirms Johnson. That means cows get feedings of first and second cutting alfalfa hay, some corn silage, high moisture corn and a 29 percent protein concentrate.

A unique feature of the Pintail Point barn is a small, closet-like, "washup" room, where milking equipment is cleaned away from the usual milkhouse site. In fact, the barn was constructed for entrance direct to the stall barn, not through the milk house, which is offset via a hallway.

In planning is a baby calf unit, immediately outside and protected by a roof extension from the stall barn. Construction is also underway for a new heifer facility.



"Home farm" at Fair Hill was a traditional hip-roofed stall barn, with freestalls, young stock facilities, feeding complex, and storage units added on since the Fry family moved here in 1960.



Cows crowd this milking parlor holding area at Fair Hill Dairy for 22 hours each day. As they wait, the "rainbirds", or spray nozzles, installed in the foreground, wash udders before the cows enter the double-ten parlor at the rear of the holding pen.



Calf hutches, up to 75 in use at a time, house replacements at Fair Hill. In the background is part of the irrigation system for the 3600 acres and a bred heifer facility with wooded pasture.