

It's No Bull**"Freemartin" Produces Four-Percent Milk**

LITITZ — "Becky" was born as a freemartin (twin with a bull) which normally would have sealed her fate and insured a trip to the slaughterhouse. However, that was not to be. Today she is producing 15 pounds of four percent milk per day and hasn't peaked yet.

Sheryl Wenger, the owner of the scientific marvel, purchased "Becky" from a neighbor. At birth, in June, 1984, she weighed in at 50 pounds, half the size of a normal calf.

This was compounded by the fact that she was born as a twin with a bull. With these points against her, the neighbor opted not to raise the calf himself and offered it to Sheryl.

Adding this calf to her small corral, Sheryl intended to raise "Becky" for beef. These plans were changed in July last year when Sheryl noticed "Becky's" udder was beginning to swell as if

she was springing.

"I starting milking her just to see if I could get any milk," Sheryl said. One her first try she squeezed out about a quarter cup of milk that had the consistency of colostrum.

"I continued to milk her out of curiosity. I wanted to see if by milking her I could stimulate more production," Sheryl added.

Gradually the milk cleared and "Becky's" production has been slowly climbing ever since. They started using the milk for their own use, making ice cream and other dairy products. When her production increased they found a ready market among their friends and neighbors.

"Becky" has a regular heat cycle and Sheryl once tried to have her bred. "The inseminator told me that she had no reproductive organs but he thought the horns and ovaries might present," Sheryl explained.

According to Dr. Dreisbach, a vet from Hamburg, these organs could produce sufficient hormones to induce lactation. He further added that a freemartin coming into lactation without benefit of hormone injections was very unlikely.

Presently this bovine wonder feeds on pasture and has grain available but she often refuses it. Sheryl's father, Earl, added that they are not feeding her anything special to support any production level.

"Becky's" future on the Wenger farm will last as long as her milk supply, then it will be the beef market for her. However, Sheryl commented that she might just sell her to someone else since butchering this cow would be difficult.

Until then, the Wengers will continue to enjoy their bovine curiosity and the attention "Becky" has been receiving.



Sheryl Wenger stands with "Becky", a freemartin that is currently producing over 14 pounds of milk a day.

**Pseudorabies Outbreak Hits Lanc. Co.**

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clude stillbirths and abortions, as well as fever, pneumonia and off-foet in sows.

Of particular concern to experts is the outbreak's spread to other species of livestock. Ironically, although the swine industry has suffered the greatest losses, the disease is actually more dangerous to other livestock. "When non-swine species are infected, it's highly fatal, whereas the fatality rate in pigs other than baby pigs is not high," Hutchinson pointed out, noting that at least four or five of the farms currently involved have experienced beef cattle losses. Dogs, cats and sheep have also been killed in the current outbreak.

Hutchinson said that direct contact between animals is the primary cause of the infection's spread. "The thing that has saved our dairy cattle is that not many farms have dairy and swine, and when they do, they don't come in direct contact," he said. "If I were a dairyman with a hog farm next to me, and knew there were cats and dogs that could go back and forth, I'd be concerned," the veterinarian cautioned.

Strasburg swine producer John Henkel agreed that the movements of all animals capable of carrying the disease should be restricted. Henkel, who currently serves as chairman of the Pennsylvania Pork Producers Council's PRV Task Force, urged farmers to tie up their dogs and be "particularly hard on cats." Wildlife can also spread the disease to swine, he said.

Hutchinson emphasized that PRV is not related to rabies and has no effect on human health. He also pointed out that, because the disease affects nervous tissue, the brain and the spinal cord, it has no direct effect on meat quality.

Producers do suffer losses when marketing infected pigs, however, because of the higher condemnation rate due to secondary disease problems that reduce meat quality. Other losses are incurred from the deaths of baby pigs and the lost reproductive potential of infected sows that are sent to slaughter.

But the really crippling losses are sustained through down time, Hutchinson said. While fixed costs continue, producers have no income from the time that infected sows are marketed to the time that replacement gilts are once again producing pigs.

Removing infected animals is the only way for producers to get out from under the quarantine imposed on infected herds. A producer with PRV-positive pigs cannot sell breeding stock and

must obtain a permit to move animals to market. All pigs must go directly to a slaughterhouse and none may be marketed through an auction.

Although improved vaccines are currently in the development stage, the most effective way to combat the disease is to depopulate an infected herd. Even when vaccinated, pigs can contract, carry and shed the virus, although vaccinated stock will not shed as much virus as "sick pigs," said Henkel.

Vaccinated sows will pass immunity to baby pigs, said Hutchinson, but it's not known exactly how long that immunity remains. The biggest problem with vaccine is that there is no way to distinguish vaccinated pigs from pigs carrying the virus, the

veterinarian said. "But the situation's changing rapidly with vaccines," Hutchinson pointed out. "A year from now we may be saying something different."

Because of vaccine's ability to mask the disease, vaccination has not been permitted in Pennsylvania. In areas involved in acute outbreaks, however, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry has elected to be more lenient. "We're giving that serious consideration," said bureau director Dr. Max Van Buskirk. "It will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. What we do insist upon is a responsible plan for eradicating the virus within the herd," Van Buskirk added.

Assistance in drawing up a written plan and submitting it to the bureau can be obtained

through an advisory team coordinated by the PRV Task Force. According to Henkel, the team will be comprised of the producer's veterinarian, the county livestock agent, a producer who has had PRV experience, a BAI official and Penn State's Larry Hutchinson.

Producers who suspect problems within their herds should first contact their veterinarians, Hutchinson advised. The next step is to submit samples for testing to PDA's Summerdale Diagnostic Lab. Where death losses are involved, a preliminary diagnosis on baby pigs can be made in a matter of hours, said Hutchinson. Blood testing requires a week or more, he said.

A House bill recently signed into

law by the Governor provides \$1.4 million to be used to cover the cost of the recent avian influenza outbreak, as well as for "incentive payments" to swine producers with PRV-infected herds. The money will be provided to producers as incentive to depopulate infected breeding

animals as quickly as possible, said Van Buskirk. Since working out the details of the indemnity program, the bureau is currently awaiting approval from legal counsel before implementing it. "I'm confident that it will be approved soon," said the bureau chief. Once approved, the incentive program will not be retroactive, he said.

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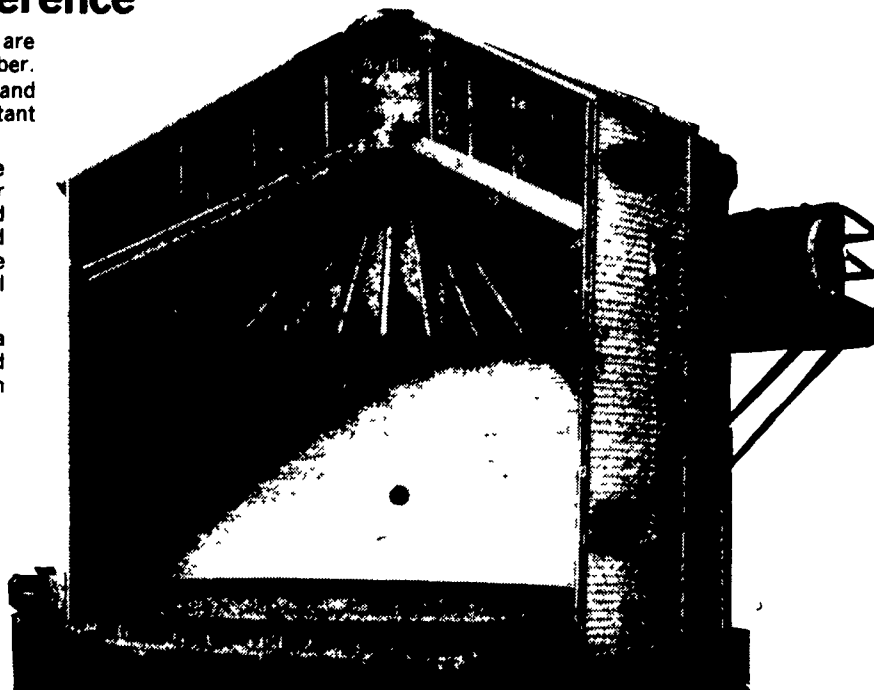
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