

Investment in Youth Pays Dividends For John Morris

BY SHARON B. SCHUSTER

Maryland Correspondent
BRADDOCK HEIGHTS, Md. — "He put us on top of the world." That's what just one of the 26 Maryland dairy judging teams had to say about their coach and mentor, John Morris.

Morris worked as a Dairy Extension Specialist at the University of Maryland for 27 years. Working half the time with 4-H and FFA youngsters, he took 26 teams to the national contest and won 13 times.

"Maryland has won the national contest more than any other state by quite a margin," Morris said proudly. He also accompanied teams to the Royal Agricultural Show in England, where the winning U.S. teams brought the coveted gold cup back to American soil three times. Morris said the event is "one of the great shows you'll see."

Morris speaks with pride when he reminisces about the teams and the individuals on the teams whom he came to regard as part of an extended family. "I enjoyed every one of them," he said. "They were all different. You get real close to all of them."

He is eager to pull out the album from his retirement in 1976, which contains page after page of photographs and letters from former 4-H'ers who expressed their gratitude for his dedication and development of the program.

"Now they're in all walks of life," added Morris. A letter from Eugene Bay, now a pastor in Rochester, New York, said, "The judging program did much to improve my mental agility. One of the values of the program for me lay in the requirement to take a position and defend it." And that is exactly how his coach planned it.

Leafing through the volumes of 8 by 10 inch team photos, he pointed out some of the members who stood out in his mind. Among them were Barbara Riggs Stiles who was the first woman ever to win an intercollegiate contest, and William Powel, who went to Europe with the winning team in 1955.

Though he accompanied several young people to Europe, Morris has witnessed in the Powel family the start of a family tradition. Powel's daughter Nancy will also travel to Europe as part of the 4-H Dairy Judging team, just as her father did over 30 years ago.

Many of the team members were just like family to Morris, and some were family. His son, Robert, and the twins, Peter and Richard, placed fifth, third, and high individual, respectively, in various judging contests.

"They placed higher than I did," chuckled Morris. "I was on a team at Iowa State and placed seventh." He said, "I almost cried," when he received the news of their placings.

In coaching teams, Morris said, "We stressed learning to be a salesman. That's something they're going to be using the rest of their lives." To that end, Morris noted he continually strived to introduce new programs and ideas to the 4-H program. "You always have to think of something new if you're going to stay on top," he advised.

With the help of Dorothy Emerson, associate state 4-H leader, he prepared a publication for new 4-H'ers to become acquainted with terms and procedures. He also enlisted the services of then governor, Theodore McKeldin to spend time with groups, helping them in the area of public speaking. Morris said the politician was quite effective, "We won a lot on reasons and public speaking."

Morris developed programs that both 4-H and FFA could use. He started the Dairy Steer and Goat Workshops. He worked with adults and purebred dairy organizations. And, he took "ghetto kids right from the heart of Baltimore," to a dairy farm where they made ice cream and ate their fill.

Morris said he first became interested in all breeds of cows. "That really helped me when I coached judging teams at the University," he said.

He began his career in 4-H as a

student at McDonogh School in Baltimore County. At 15, he became part of the Maryland 4-H judging team. He went on to become part of a collegiate team at Iowa State where he studied Dairy Science. He also classified for Jersey and Brown Swiss breed organizations.

"I brought back new ideas for extension," Morris said, speaking of his travels while judging and classifying. Those ideas ranged from the promotional "pretty animal contest," to practical applications, such as plans for a hoof trimming chute. He said that he got the dimensions on a visit to California, had them drawn up and published in Hoard's Dairyman.

Morris said the plans turned out to be a much sought after item in the magazine, with hundreds of requests for the plans upon their publication.

The success Morris has enjoyed, such as induction into the Maryland Dairy Shrine and the 4-H Hall of Fame, and as recipient of the Honorary American Farmer Degree, a respected judge and dairy specialist, he is quick to give credit to his wife, Martha, for her support, understanding, and assistance through the years. "She's a big part of it," he said. "You have to have an understanding family to travel as much as I did."

A few minutes spent with Martha Morris, and it is evident that she is as caught up in the whirlwind of the dairy scene as much as her infamous husband. She has created an atmosphere within their modern Braddock Heights home that carries over the dairy theme into their everyday lifestyle.

Her handiwork framed on the walls bears the likeness of Holsteins, a decorative churn near the fireplace is etched with a dairy farm scene, and numerous photographs and awards attest to her involvement in the dairy community.

The chemistry major and once extension agent applied her scientific background at home. She outfitted the many windows of their mountaintop home with at-



John Morris and his wife, Martha, stand in front of the numerous award he has received over the years.

tractive window quilts, which she determined lower the temperature in the rooms up to 5 degrees per hour, even on the steamiest Maryland day.

And, she has definite ideas about the dairy industry. One of its staunchest supporters, she said, "Give the American farmer a challenge and he's going to beat it." Her husband added, "People don't realize how cheap they eat."

Production has increased so much through better feeding, managing and A.I. But, they agreed that farmers "need to do more themselves in promotion." Mrs. Morris said milk promotion begins on the farm. "Drink it at home," she said emphatically.

The couple, who said they didn't own a coffee pot until "a couple of years ago," said, "We stick by our dairy products."

The Morrises, since retirement, really haven't retired from involvement in the dairy community, they have just shifted into different kinds of dairy related activities.

He serves as secretary for the Maryland Holstein Association and she acts as the unofficial treasurer.

Still on the judging circuit, Morris will judge the Pennsylvania Holstein Show in the fall. He also

serves as coordinator for dairy tour groups. He has arranged a tour for the Erie County, Pennsylvania Holstein Association in late July. They keep in touch with the daily goings-on of dairy farms across the state through visits, tours, meetings, shows and contests.

A step into the background of their sky-high home affords a panoramic view of the fertile Middletown Valley. Pointing to the well-managed dairy farm below, Morris said that 25 percent of the dairy animals in the state are right in his own back yard, in Frederick County. And that's just the way he likes it.

Many awards, artifacts, letters and photographs stand as testimony to the Morrises' dedication to and involvement in the dairy community.

There is one photo among the many displayed in their home, that captures the essence of their story. One of Morris' winning teams that made it to Europe presented him with a photograph of themselves poised on a high peak, overlooking a beautiful pastoral scene far below.

Their lofty perch illustrates what they said with heartfelt thanks after they won the Gold Cup — "You put us on top of the world."

Maryland Correspondent

Sharon Schuster

If she's not wrestling with the computer to find just the right words for a feature, you might find Sharon Schuster wrangling with some of the 50 head of black baldies that she and her family raise on their farm near New Windsor, Maryland.

A recent addition to the Lancaster Farming staff, she now serves as correspondent for Maryland.

The University of Maryland graduate teaches Spanish to gifted eighth graders in the Carroll County, Maryland public school system. After having earned her Master's degree at Western Maryland College, where she is also an adjunct instructor in the graduate education department, she has pursued a doctoral equivalency which she will complete next year.

Schuster also writes for the local newspaper, The Carroll County Evening Sun, and she is author of The History of Greenwood Church. Twice winner of the American Heritage and Patriotism Essay Contest in Maryland, she is interested in many styles of writing: journalistic, creative, historical, etc.

The Schusters reside in the 1840's farmhouse on her

family's farm, along with Mohawk and Fu-Fu (their dogs, which she characterizes as loyal, faithful and good - most of the time), and many other resident cats. They still have two more rooms to go in the renovation process that they started seven years ago.

They built up their herd of Hereford, Angus and Holstein crosses with just 4 stockyard veal calves. Now it has grown into a full fledged farming operation, including some registered hereford stock.



Sharon Schuster

Mulches are Valuable Tools for Weed Control

FLEMINGTON, N.J. — Mulches reduce evaporation of water from soil and prevent weeds from sprouting by screening out the light from the surface. Mulches also protect the surface soil from the pounding of raindrops, which tend to pack the soil and make it harder for rain or irrigation water to penetrate. The slower penetration into a packed surface means more water is lost as runoff.

If you place the mulch around newly set plants before the weeds start to grow, the need to use a cultivator or a hoe can be eliminated. Hoeing or cultivating is not a one-time operation; it must be done whenever new weeds sprout, and is necessary to loosen packed soil. Frequent cultivating is unnecessary with a mulch in place, and you will appreciate the lessened work, especially when the hot sun of summer makes cultivating an unpleasant chore. By reducing evaporation, a mulch can cut the need for frequent watering, which can result in savings on your water bill.

Selection of the right mulch is important. Salt hay does a good job and does not contain weed seeds. Salt hay is sold by the bale and a few bales go a long way.

Grass clippings are good, but may contain weed seeds. If your lawn was treated with herbicide, do not use clippings until the fourth mowing. Salt hay and grass

clippings should be at least two inches deep to do a good job. Where vegetables are seeded in rows or hills, wait until the young plants are sprouted and at least several inches high before putting the mulch in place.

Avoid using leaves because they pack together when wet and prevent water from penetrating or evaporating. Straw can be used as a mulch, but nitrogen in the soil will decompose the straw and this action can create a shortage of nitrogen available for your plants. Peat moss is not as good as salt hay and grass clippings, since it is acid and usually more expensive; also, once the surface becomes very dry, it takes considerable time to get wet enough to draw water down in the soil.

Wood chips are fine around shrubs and flower borders, but not desirable in vegetable gardens because they take several years to decompose and, until they do, they

can be an obstruction when preparing a seedbed for planting.

Black polyethylene mulch film makes a good mulch for transplants, which are set through holes cut in the film. The film is secured by placing soil over the edges of the film.

In a recent research project conducted in Delaware, tomatoes mulched with five sheets of newspaper produced the highest yield compared with straw, plastic or nothing. Three inches of newspaper edge are covered with soil (trench-like) to prevent the paper from blowing away. Wet the paper and cover with bark chips if you find the newspaper objectionable to look at.

Mulching can give you peace of mind while you are on vacation. The assurance that your soil will retain more moisture, even in dry weather, and the knowledge that you will not return to a weed patch can be very comforting.

