

Fetrow Farms is the Cream of York County DHIA

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

YORK — "We don't do anything right," chuckles Ron Fetrow, leaning back against a stall pipe in the airy, whitewashed tie-stall barn at Blue Knoll farms.

Cows don't get lead feeding before they freshen. The calves, usually unaided, at a barn a half-mile distant, where they run through their dry period with a string of heifers. Calves are raised, not in individual hutches, but in part of the bank-style barn, tied where milking stalls were removed.

In spite of the rundown of items Fetrows claim they're doing "wrong," the herd has been topping York County's DHIA chart for well over a year, since January of 1985. Attesting to "right" management is the current rolling herd average on 82 milking head of registered Holsteins is 21,785 milk and 768 fat.

Blue Knoll farms is owned in partnership by brothers Howard and Ralph Fetrow. They grew up, and even attended school, on this family farm, which they took over in 1979, after the death of their father, Harvey. Herd average then was 17,446 milk, 648 fat.

"It's just been climbing gradually, but steadily," affirms Howard, who handles most of the general management of the farm and who hauls milk parttime for Rutter's Dairy where the Fetrows market their production. His son Ron is in charge of the herd health and breeding, since graduating in 1983 from Penn State. Ralph manages the cropping program, and assists with milking. One full-time employee, and Ralph's grandson, who lends a hand part-time, round out the management team at Blue Knoll.

Well-grown heifers, tight culling

requirements and consistency in feeding and milking schedules all contribute to the impressive accomplishments of this herd. Heifers are bred on size, but generally freshen in the 28 to 30 months range.

"If they're bigger when they calve, they just milk better," the Fetrows agree. And, after calving, heifers come under close scrutiny in the milk string. Sixty pounds per day wins a heifer the right to stay in the milk string. If she's from a solid "good family" pedigree, a fifty-pound start is tolerated.

It's a game plan that's paying off, with two-year-olds frequently milking between 80 to 100 pounds per day. Several first-lactation DHIA 305-day projections are over 20,000, and the 20 two-year-olds are averaging over 19,000. At least 36 individuals in the high-production herd have peaked over 100 pounds of daily production.

"Everyone feeds," quips Ron, who quickly adds, "But we can't run around all day with a feed cart. Cows don't get any special attention."

Corn silage — 45 pounds per cow — goes into the trough at noon, when the herd is brought back into the barn after morning exercise turnout. Grain is fed evenings, and hay is offered outside both morning and evening. Total ration is at a 17 percent protein level, and sodium bicarb helps hold fat averages steady.

Dry cows join bred heifers in loose housing on an adjoining farm of the Fetrows. Hay is the mainstay feed here, supplemented with a home ground ear corn mix and a small amount of silage.

Since hay is such a vital part of the Blue Knoll feeding ration, Ralph takes special pains to put in top quality alfalfa and timothy-mixed balings. Rounding out the hay plantings and spacious

pastures are 200 acres of corn and 75 in wheat on the 273 owned plus 200 rented acres.

Two cow families comprise the bulk of the herd, both founded on daughters of MooKown Optimist who were born five days apart 13 years ago.

Blue-Knoll Optimist Bertha, VG-86, has lifetime records over 200,000 milk and 7,000 fat. Her daughters and granddaughters currently in the herd total 21. Blue Knoll Queen Optimist, with more than 186,000 lifetime production, numbers 18 daughters and granddaughters in the herd. And each of the Optimist brood cows has produced an Excellent daughter.

Type, especially on legs and feet, has become the number one mating priority, and butterfat holds a close second.

Atlantic sires have seen steady use in the Fetrow herd over the years, with Stewart and Rusty current sire favorites. Marvex left a positive mark here, siring several in the milking string, including one daughter with 29,000-plus in 365 days. A half-dozen Very daughters are performing well, carrying high fat tests. Also turning up on Ron's herd breeding charts recently are the likes of Board Chairman and Bell.

"What we don't look at are index numbers," emphasizes Ron. "That's the worst number in the industry."

While 95 percent of matings are by A.I., a young sire runs with heifers over the summer, to maintain conception levels and lessen handling of young stock during the heat and harvest season.

"We sell very few cows because of breeding problems since Ron took over that part of the operation," Howard is quick to note. "Some of our success with the increase in production is due to getting them bred back to calve within the year."

However, the Fetrows aren't afraid to merchandise breeding stock. They firmly believe that if someone is interested in an animal, at whatever age, they'll talk business.

Although the Blue Knoll herd is relatively new to the type classification program, BAA on their most recent scoring was at 102.

Along with the increased emphasis on herd type, the Fetrow family is mulling over entering their first cattle show this summer. Ron has taken a special liking to a correct, leggy, October heifer by Bell, and would like to measure her possibilities on the tanbark.

Long range plans here include Ron's continued interest in managing and continuing to im-



Four generations of Fetrow farmers have worked the land of this neatly maintained and manicured northern York County dairy operation.



From left, Ron, Ralph, Howard Fetrow and Floyd Armolt join Jolene, a Blue Knoll herd favorite, on a pasture hill behind the dairy barn.

prove the Blue Knoll herd, while his dad and uncle hint occasionally at looking toward retirement. Heifer percentages this spring have been running high with 9 of the last 11 baby calves being heifers, and Ron has high hopes for their future production and type promise.

Blue Knoll traces its history

back to 1912, when Samuel Fetrow and his family began share-farming with owner Dr. Charles Lenhart. Ten years later, they purchased the 104-acre farm. In 1947, Harvey Fetrow acquired the 124-acre William Smyser farm to expand the family's holdings, and in 1956 added the adjoining Edward Melhorn place.

Berks County Sets Holstein Sale

The Berks County Holstein Club will hold the 10th annual club sale on August 28, 1986. Bred heifers and young cows that are representative of the consigner's herd are now being selected.

A member of the Sale Committee

will be contacting prospective consigners during June. Anyone with questions or possible animals for sale are encouraged to contact Dean Hartman at 215-374-0908 (day) or 215-678-2014 (after 8:00 p.m.).



Ron Fetrow has taken a special interest in working with this October calf, sired by Bell and from their 13-year-old Optimist brood cow.



At 13 years, and going strong with lifetime credits of over 200,000 milk, this Optimist brood cow has 21 daughters and granddaughters in the Blue Knoll herd.

York County Correspondent Joyce Bupp

Joyce Bupp has been Lancaster Farming's York County Correspondent for nine years.

She and her husband, Leroy operate Bupplynn Farms, near Loganville, with 200 head of milking registered Holsteins. Their children Patty, 17, and Richard, 14, are actively involved in the family farm.

Joyce is a board member of the Middle Atlantic Division of Dairyman, Inc., and the Dairy Council of the Upper Chesapeake Bay. She is co-coach of the county's Junior Holstein and 4-H Dairy Bowl teams. The Bupps are involved in the Holstein Association, 4-H, and dairy promotion activities.

Holstein News, Holstein World, and Heard's Dairyman are some of the publications that have printed Joyce's work. She received an award from Women in Communications for her column, On Being a Farm Wife. One of her Lancaster Farming articles also placed



Joyce Bupp

third in a competition hosted by Penn-Ag Industries.

However, Joyce notes, "The greatest honors I have are my kids and my Dairy Bowl Kids."