

Kopfers Begin Reign As Berks County's Farm Family



Robert and Caroll Kopfer pose with their son, David, in front of the steer barn. They feed over 100 steers annually.

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Berks County Correspondent
FLEETWOOD — Dedication and a strong commitment to a full family life on the farm signaled the awarding of the Reading Fair's 1986 Berks County Outstanding Farm Family honors to the Robert and Caroll Kopfer Family, Fleetwood R2.

The family of four, Robert, Caroll, daughter, Ann, age 18, and son, David, age 12, were presented the award at the recent Reading Fair awards banquet. They were also the honored guests at the Reading Fair as leaders in the opening parade and ribbon cutting ceremonies, and also present at many of the fair's family related activities.

A visit to the Kopfer home at 4 K's Farm showcases the family's commitment to the country life and its related chores and organizations. Awards and crafts grace the walls of their home.

Family talents and handiworks are evident in the stenciling done by Caroll and displayed on the walls and with the basketry, wreaths, and sewing done by Caroll and Ann.

The farm, located several miles off of Route 222 on Pleasantville Road, features two farms on 450 acres with steer housing facilities, grain drying and storage, a spacious dairy barn, and lovely stone homes.

"I got it in my blood," states Robert Kopfer reminiscing about his start in farming. Replying that he always wanted to farm, Kopfer began his dream when he was still in high school, gaining valuable experience while working on neighbors' farms. In 1962, he was able to rent a farm on his own, and by 1970, Kopfer gained enough equity to purchase his present farm. In 1974, he purchased another farm close by. This farm became his present dairy, where

he started milking his own cows one year later.

Beginning small with 21 cows before expanding to his present 65 head, Kopfer is proud of his time spent on the farm. The Kopfer herd of 65 registered and grade Holsteins are currently averaging over 19,400 pounds of milk with a 3.5 percent test and 671 pounds of fat. They are milked in the stanchion barn with a pipeline milking system. "I'm going to try to push for a little more butterfat and a little less milk," Kopfer says of the future efforts with his herd.

Kopfer grows his own feeds and the herd is fed shelled corn, haylage, and a roasted soybean mix balanced to meet nutritional needs. Feeding is spread to four times a day to keep freshness and increase intake. Cows are bred AI and a bull is run with the heifers.

All heifers are raised as replacement animals and all bull calves are raised to add a second income as finished steers.

Approximately 100 steers are finished out at the home farm with some contracted and others from his bull calves. All calves are raised individually in hutches and calf kennels.

The Kopfer acres are divided into 220 acres of corn, 80 acres of alfalfa, 45 acres of soybeans, and the double cropping of oats, barley, and wheat. Five years ago Kopfer went to minimum tillage.

"The clay gets too hard," he says about conventional plowing. "The disc and chisel keeps the mulch on top, and the moisture stays on top," he explains. "I don't even own a moldboard plow anymore," he said. Corn fields are also chemically treated to make water absorb better into the ground. The special chemical keeps the ground from sealing and lets the water absorb instead of running off. Kopfer added that these practices prevent much erosion in his fields.

This past year Kopfer also added an Aero Dry system to his grain operation. A drying unit as well as a storage unit, Kopfer estimates he will be able to dry his own grains and then store them until prices are better. "It gives a real good product," he states. "I'm real pleased with it."

The Kopfers employ a husband-wife team to help with the dairy and another employee to help in the fields. Son, David, helps in the fields and with calves when he is able. Until Ann left for her freshman year in college, she helped milk on weekends and did much of the cooking for the family.

A full-time beautician with her shop at home, Caroll Kopfer is the secretary for the farm, runs for parts, keeps abreast of market changes, participates in many farm organizations and coordinates family life.

"We work together on our records," Caroll states. She adds, "We share responsibilities. We coordinate and cover for each other," concerning the many farm chores and meetings.

"It's an attitude," Caroll states about their successful farming operation and family life. "We always worked together for a common cause," she explained.

Caroll summed up the philosophy of Berks County's newest member of the group of outstanding farm families, "We always worked toward one point, making a goal of a good family life from the farm. It's what we all believe in and how we worked together to get it all done."

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