

# Holstein Assoc. Breaks Ground For New Barn

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the Susquehanna River's east shore, initial improvements focused on remodeling the first floor of the capacious, stone bank barn into holding pens. The first large pole barn, with an office area, was added in 1979. A second pole barn, which housed the 1980 Pittsburgh convention sale animals, was relocated to the farm.

While a high-priced U.S. dollar had reined in the cattle export business during recent years, the dollar's leveling, plus renewed governmental interest in boosting U.S. exports, are combining to make American cattle a commodity in demand. PHA's latest addition puts members in the position of owning the largest such facility in the East, and possibly in the country, to serve this specialized export trade.

"Under the new Export Enhancement Program, our government is subsidizing the cost of livestock to boost export business" explains Nichol. "If a foreign buyer can buy heifers for \$800 from our competition countries, and we need \$1,000, our government will subsidize the \$200 difference to encourage export activity."

Nichol anticipates a continued brisk business in the cattle exporting market, since new countries are continually developing an interest in better breeding cattle, and a shortage of high quality livestock exists in international markets.

"We now have the capacity to handle a full boat load of heifers, or about 500 bred heifers at a thousand pounds," says Nichol. "That gives us the increased possibilities of loading out ships from Philadelphia or Baltimore."

A planned lengthening of the runway at Harrisburg International, which is located only two road miles from the farm's entrance, will further enhance PHA's exporting position.

"If we fly cattle by 747's they have to go out of JFK Airport in New York," Nichol adds. "The runway here just isn't long enough for safely handling a loaded plane that size."

However, the Brazilian six-plane-shipment will be loaded on the Harrisburg tarmac, since they will be sent on the smaller Boeing 707. That eliminates the long tractor-trailer haul to JFK, and cuts a few hours from a long, tiring trip for the cattle.

With a decade of experience behind them, Holstein planners of the new facility, working with the construction expertise of the Henry S. Lapp firm, White Horse, were able to add features that enhance cattle well-being and ease of handling large numbers.

The use of individual head-catch gates will eliminate some of the constant herding through chutes of animals being tested to meet the rigid health requirements imposed by many importing countries. Some countries require animals to pass the testing for such exotic diseases as anaplasmosis, blue tongue or avian tuberculosis not once, but twice.

Feed troughs which separate holding pens have been built a bit wider than usual, preventing animals on either side from being able to touch each other, another cattle health and quarantine innovation. And, a load-out alley the full length of the new facility means a pen of heifers can be moved from any of the several lots with no disturbance to the others.

The farm is an official federal quarantine facility, and used for assembly of not only PHA shipments, but those of other exporters as well. Holstein-Friesian Services, exports arm of the national Holstein Association, is a regular user of the farm for assembling shipments. And, Heifer Project International, a branch of Church World Service, often has livestock in the testing process in PHA's barns.

Howard Weiss is the manager of the farm, a Dauphin County Holstein breeder with plenty of experience in handling cattle. While he occasionally helps with selection of export animals, the bulk of Weiss' time centers on the care of the animals at the facility, from perhaps as few as a dozen or two to full shipments of several hundred, and upkeep of the growing facility.

In past years, however, Weiss has accompanied cattle to Hungary and Italy, and is often one of the last persons on hand to see a shipment off at the runway. He's milked cows by hand, just before their departure for a distant country, fed baby calves, helped maneuver grown bulls into cargo pens, and even kept an eye on a buffalo during his trip with PHA cattle to Hungary.

"It had been donated to a zoo," he chuckles, remembering the bulky livestock passenger.

When Weiss arrives at the farm each morning, he can never quite know for sure what foreign visitors might stop by before the day's end. That lends an international flavor to working with the PHA farm, and has left the former dairy farmer with acquaintances from around the globe, "and always sociable ones," he affirms.

Nichol, who with his wife, Lily, frequently hosts foreign buyers in their State College home, also speaks fondly of the friendships and memorable experiences that have resulted from the PHA's international business. He especially remembers a pair of Russian buyers spending their first visit in a private home. They took a special liking to the billiards game Nichol taught them, and through their interpreter, teased about leaving a couple of purchased bulls behind to allow room on the plane for taking home Nichol's basement pool table.

But it is the grassroots member-breeders who make PHA's export business so successful, Nichol is



Farm manager Howard Weiss, center, consults on barn construction with builder Henry Lapp and Lapp's son-in-law Amos Petersheim.

quick to credit. He takes special pride in the Association's network of county selectors, who respond when a call goes out for an export shipment to be filled.

"They're a big plus; we can put together a large shipment in a hurry with their help. And there is no way that our three-man staff could handle it alone," says the Holstein executive secretary. For some orders, such as the upcoming Brazilian one, the Holstein staffers travel with buyers from the importing country, who make their own on-farm selections.

Nichol believes that enhancement of the members' business is "probably the greatest service we can provide." PHA's international and domestic sales efforts have done just that, providing over half the Association's annual income. Without that, says the secretary, the staff would likely be a one-man effort, and less able to provide membership services.

Such sales, he adds, have also encouraged members to participate in breed improvement programs, plus providing a sales outlet for qualifying animals at prices often somewhat above the domestic level.

Over the next few months, a full schedule of shipments are already in various stages of planning, both

for PHA and outside users of the farm. Over the next few months, cattle will leave this facility for herds in Taiwan, Morocco, and Mexico. Japan, Saudia Arabia and Canada continue to be frequent destinations for shipments which leave here. And North African and Asian countries are likely to remain in the cattle export picture for some time in the future.

The new barn may place the farm in a greater role in state Holstein activities as well. Already under consideration is use of the facility for the annual spring Pennsylvania on Parade calf and bred heifer sales.

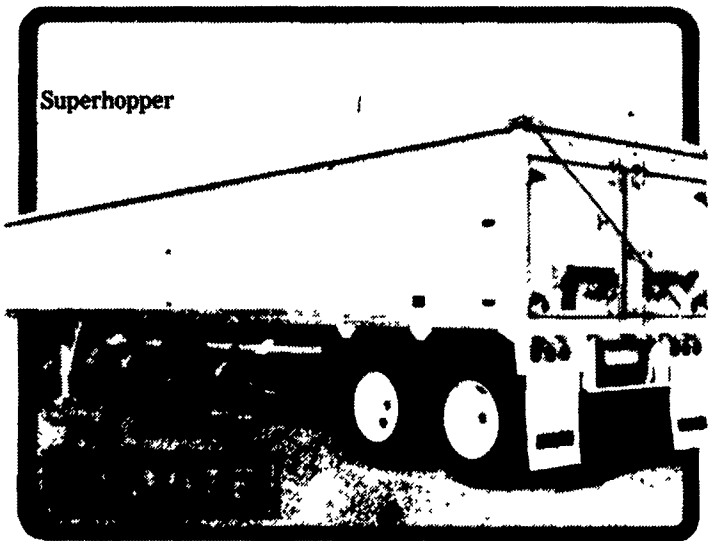
In addition to playing a considerable role in upgrading the world's livestock bloodlines, PHA's farm and exporting activities have undoubtedly paved a way toward better understanding among those of diverse cultures doing business together.

"I've never dealt with anyone I could consider an enemy," reflects Bill Nichol. "If people like the ones who work with this program were running the world, we could cut back on a lot of defense budgets."

And, in the long run, greater worldwide personal understanding and friendship might be the greatest "harvest" PHA's exporting and sales farm could ever produce.



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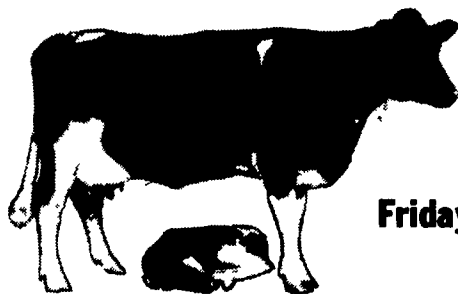
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