

# Recognizing A Situation's Potential Keys Woods' Success

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**MANSFIELD** — The best registered Holstein herd in Pennsylvania can be a topic for intense discussion. Tioga County's candidate for the title lies near Mansfield and is owned by Gordon and Dorothy Wood.

A point in favor of the Gor-Wood-D Acres is the composition of the 149 cow herd: 40 Excellents, 85 Very Goods and 24 Good Pluses.

Statistics on the home herd are a BAA of 108.8 with a rolling herd average of 20,300 pounds of milk and 675 pounds of fat. A second herd housed at their Tioga farm maintains a BAA of 104.6 with a rolling herd average of 17,683 pounds of milk and 605 pounds of fat. The majority of their herd is homebred.

This year at the Pennsylvania Holstein Show Gordon Wood won the coveted premier breeder banner for the second time, placed first in the dam and daughter class, and placed third or better in five other classes.

The Woods with help from their son Ron farm 2,500 acres using atypical methods. Additionally, the Woods find time to run an auctioneering business. But it hasn't always been this way.

Recognizing the potential in a situation and bringing it to fruition be it a rundown farm or a three-teated cow, is an attribute of the Wood family that has paid off.

Four prior owners had bought their 200-acre hilltop farm and let it go back before the Woods purchased it in 1947.

"It wasn't much," Ron Wood says, adding that the land was so rundown that most of the hay from the entire farm fit into one mow. The barn was badly in need of repair and in the winter, Dorothy recalls, snow flew through the cracks in the walls of the house.

"Gordon, though, liked the barn and I liked the house," Dorothy says, and they bought the farm. From their hilltop home the Woods enjoy a picturesque view of the countryside for miles around.

Starting with a herd of approximately 40 grade cows, Gordon worked full time in a nearby factory to make ends meet while Dorothy took up the slack at home. In addition to the rundown buildings there were other obstacles. Their scant water supply diminished in dry weather, forcing them to haul water for livestock in the dry season. The soil was clay, and in some places just two inches deep.

But persevering, the Woods progressed, gradually adding one nearby farm after another to their original acreage and increasing

the number of cattle. At one point, after a barn fire, they made the decision to sell all grade cows and keep only registered animals. Their decision paid off eventually, but at the time it proved costly.

According to Ron, they said 12 grade cows that were giving over 1,000 fat at the time and their herd average dropped from 18,600 milk, 750 fat to 16,000 milk and 600 fat.

Eventually they purchased the original Kinnan Farm and later two other farms at Tioga, about a half-hour drive from the home farm. At the 1,300 acre Tioga farm comprised mainly of river bottom they house 70 milk cows, keep a barn for dry cows and have a heifer barn which holds 120 head of calves and yearlings. In 1980 they built an addition on the home farm barn, installed a manure pit, and changed the milk pipeline from 1½ to 2 inches.

Organization, Gordon feels, accounts for much of the success of their present day operation. "Overall on everything I do all the planning," he says, adding that everyone has certain responsibilities. Dorothy, he reports, answers the constantly ringing phone to take and relay messages, Ron takes care of registering all the cattle and is herdsman for the home herd, Michael Wood is herdsman for the Tioga farm, William Baily takes care of the heifer barn and John Cooper helps with show cattle and with sales.

Success comes from setting goals, according to Ron. "The thing is to set goals — standards that are reachable, and then move them up."

One of Ron's long term goals was to have a herd average of over 20,000 pounds; they achieved this goal within the past year. Another goal was to raise their BAA average; he terms their present BAA of 108.8 as phenomenal.

"When you go over 108 with a homebred herd ... it's hard to top."

How have the Woods gone about achieving such a top herd? Aside from hard work and perseverance, several factors are apparent. The Woods started with good stock. Although Gordon began with grade cows, many were of the Rag Apple bloodline purchased at a sale in Malone, N.Y.

Additionally, the Woods purchase carefully chosen top grade animals to complement their herd. Faye, 2E-91, by Lassie Leader, according to Ron, was one of the Woods' all time top cows and also the most expensive bovines they've purchased.

One day in 1970, Dorothy says, Gordon invited her for a ride in the Amish country, whereupon they finished up at a cattle auction



Ron, left, Dorothy and Gordon Wood stand with their award winning cows in the background.

paying \$8,000 for Faye to consign, Charlie Myers.

"I almost divorced him," Dorothy recalls, laughing.

Faye, Ron says, was the highest lifetime cow they ever had. She had a very prolific heifer family, he adds, and 24 to 25 cows in their milking string are her descendants.

A prime factor in making their herd what it is today, Ron observes, has been getting out and actually seeing other farms — noting how they do things and looking at good cattle. The Woods accomplish this in two ways. With their sale business they see a lot of cattle and farms and also when they show cows. They have been involved with the show ring for 16 years.

"The sale business forces us to get out to see other herds," Ron says. He adds he's surprised how many dairymen never go anywhere to see how other farmers do things. Ron reports whenever he takes a vacation he always makes it a point to visit farms in the vicinity. He has visited farms at various states in the continental U.S. and Hawaii and claims he has gathered much useful information in this way.

Breeding is another crucial component of a good herd. "To a young fellow, I'd say don't hesitate to buy a three-teater if she has the breeding behind her," Gordon advises.

"But we have bought cows for their looks," Ron adds.



Gor Wood D Creek Harriet is one of the foundation cows at the Woods' farm. Classified EX-92, she has won All-Pennsylvania honors as a 4 year old and as a 5 year old. Her top production record is close to 28,000 pounds of milk.

The Woods agree they try to breed a balanced cow. "We breed for a cow that has a pleasing type with longevity and that is functional," says Ron in summation.

The Rag Apple bloodline is the foundation of their herd, Ron explains. Then in sequence, they used the sires Elevation, Arlinda Chief sons, and now use Valiant.

Ron attributes the major success of their herd to Roberta, 3E-94, by Rockman. "She showed, she produced and reproduced — a true brood cow," he claimed.

She won grand champion several times, state dam and daughter twice, state produce of dam once, and two of her offspring went All-American Ron reports. Although she's been dead seven years, four of her offspring were on the cover of Holstein World in October.

Out of Roberta's 13 offspring, 12 were daughters. Five of her descendants classified Excellent and eight classified Very Good. There are 30 of her descendants in the Woods' milking herd through sons and daughters and not counting the heifers, Ron says.

Currently, their fat level isn't as high as they'd like it to be, Ron admits. He observes that for two or three generations they used low test bulls and, "We got caught." But Ron says he would much prefer to have type and production and select for test since test is more genetically inherited.

When they cull, according to Ron, they cull for type more than for production. "Persistence of milk is one thing we like," he adds.

Any cow below 80 points is automatically subject to culling, Ron says. Depending upon how they scored, he adds, they are given a second chance.

Another factor contributing to the Wood's prosperity is their knack for sifting through various farming practices to find what works for them. They employ several divergent dairy and farming practices.

The Woods believe in pasturing their cattle and Gordon says it pays. "We have better herd health plus better breeding with pasturing," he states.

Ron feels pasturing the herd costs a lot less than just straight feeding in the barn due to labor costs. The herd is put out around 9 to 10 a.m. and return to the barn around 2 p.m. and then turned out to pasture all night. Ron adds they try to pasture them near the house so the cows don't have a long walk back to the barn.

Concerning calving and the raising of calves, Ron says, they like their cows to freshen in the pasture if at all possible. Then the calves are taken to a box stall that is clean. He gives the calves colostrum and lets the calves nurse from a bottle for the first week instead of a bucket to insure a smooth consumption of the milk. After that he puts them on a bucket. They are given a whole milk diet with a scour additive. He has little time for milk replacers.

"I think farmers who use milk replacer ought to be hung up," he states emphatically.

He is a firm believer in hutches noting that hutch calves are much more aggressive than others raised together. At four to five months the calves are put in tie stalls. The advantage of this is that they get accustomed to getting up and down in a stall which prevents injuries later.



Since the Woods pasture their cattle much of the time, most of their house is surrounded by cows. The pasture encompasses the house on three sides with the road completing the square. The barn stands across the road from the house.