

Optimism Prevails At New, New Jersey Dairy Farm

JACKSON, N.J. — Establishing a dairy farm on the sandy soils of central New Jersey, halfway between the thriving metropolises of New York, Philadelphia and Atlantic City, could be construed as crazy or requiring a large dose of pluck.

Filling the bill, Tenpenny Farm is riding a wave of optimism that dairy farming can survive in New Jersey despite skyrocketing land values and suburban sprawl. Owners Vince and Kelley Blasco are entering into the dairy business with the conviction that the "best way for us to make it (in dairy farming) in New Jersey is to direct market milk."

When investigating the feasibility of dairy farming, dairy specialists at Penn State and Rutgers told the Blascos they were crazy, however they were always there with answers to our questions, according to Vince.

Added encouragement came from articles in farm newspapers and magazines. Vince noted that the message he received from the articles was that there is still hope in dairy farming, if debt is kept to a minimum.

Ultimately, within five years, they plan to open a jugging operation that specializes in cream-line milk. After constructing half of the necessary buildings, increasing the herd to 36 total head, and clearing one-fourth of the total land, the Blascos are on their way to seeing their plan to fruition.

Vince and his wife, Kelley, were

drawn into dairy farming over a period of three years. Neither possess a farm background. "Our background on animals was limited to pets — maybe," Vince explained.

In 1981 they moved to their present home in Ocean County and started with 18 acres and racehorses. The Blascos bought their first cow, a Jersey-Holstein cross, "Pearly Mae," in mid-1982. Their four children were drinking two gallons of milk a day and they decided "why not, we had the horses, how much more trouble could a cow be," Vince noted.

A visit to a neighbor netted them "Peaches," a Jersey cow. "We fell in love with her and couldn't resist. We didn't need her and had to scrape for the money to pay for her," Kelly said. The Blascos paid for Peaches by selling a sailboat for \$850, Peaches exact price.

A large senior citizen community, which remembers raw milk from their youth, surrounds the Blascos' home of Jackson, near Toms River and Lakewood. These neighbors, knowing of the Blascos' cows, inquired about possibly purchasing milk from the Blascos and implanted the idea of opening a jugging operation, Vince noted.

These requests spurred him into contacting the New Jersey department of agriculture. New Jersey state officials came out to look at the Blascos' facilities, Vince said. The officials took a quick inspection of their dilapidated barn and informed Vince and Kelley that major

repairs would be needed before they could sell milk.

This rejection lead them to seriously consider purchasing the land next door which was for sale at "a reasonable price," Vince said.

"My wife had to kick me and told me we were going to buy the place even if I had to go back to work to make the payments," he said. Vince, trained in construction, found employment as a construction inspector. Another party's interest in the overgrown property hastened their decision.

"We had leased it for two years with the option to buy. 1983 was not a good market for land. Then things started to change," Kelley said. Which added to the difficulty in obtaining the land.

The original property owner realized he had sold the land too cheaply and insisted on holding the closing on the agreed upon day of May 1, 1985. The Blascos requested an extension of six days while their sale of two houses was completed. They also sought a short-term loan during the interim between the closing and their house sale.

Then, Vince relates, he "darn near had to sue the banks for a loan." The banks which Blascos dealt with were unfamiliar with agriculture thus making them reluctant to authorize a loan in spite of the Blascos' healthy credit line. A timely call to the bank commissioners office yielded both the extension and the loans necessary for the closing, Vince explained.

During the two years they leased the land, Vince and Kelley were busy clearing land and accumulating information, equipment and cows to prepare them for the move to full-time dairying.

"We talked to innumerable dairy farmers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We'd be driving down the roads in Pennsylvania and Vince would see some farmers and say 'I'm going to stop and talk.' Specifically he was looking for juggers but he'd stop and talk to any dairy farmer," Kelley said.

They also quizzed the professors at Penn State and Rutgers Universities and "did an awful lot of reading," she noted.

On the medical end, Pearly Mae provided a hands-on type of education. "She was our first everything — first cow, first bull calf, first heifer, first twins, first retained placenta and first breech birth," Kelley explained.

Kelley, who is a registered nurse, has found her medical background to be very helpful, especially with the closest vet, with a specialty in cows, living 45 miles away. "He told us that cows have the same ailments as people — except the cows have a few more stomachs." She noted that with her background she is able to solve a lot of little problems.

By starting gradually the Blascos were able to see the symptoms and health problems one cow at a time.

Vince cites as the "nail in the coffin to getting started" a visit to a jugging operation outside Penn State. "People were standing in line on the street to get what they were selling." And after tasting



The recently completed barn contains 40 tie stalls and two box stalls. The milking parlor will join this barn and a similar barn. Planning to add to the stall barn, the Blascos did not have the end of the roof finished.



Vince, left, and Kelley Blasco hold their two original cows, Peaches, left, and Pearly Mae.

first hand the quality that attracted the crowd, he decided to model their operation on the same concept.

To offer quality milk and ice cream products they opted to raise Guernseys. In order to compete with the local convenience stores and grocery stores, we have to sell a richer, creamier, higher fat product, Vince said. To meet this criteria, Tenpenny farm will be selling Golden Guernsey milk in glass bottles to add to the milk's appeal.

They learned about Golden Guernsey milk from a nearby farm during their explorations. This farm also provided the foundation for their Guernsey herd. The Blascos purchased a dry cow bred to Kelloggs Minnies Choice.

Raising registered cows was a business decision. Vince explained that with proper management they would be breeding with AI to improve the herd and AI costs are the same for grade or registered animals. Plus with registered cows there is an added market from the sale of the animals.

When Tenpenny farm begins their jugging operations, they plan to offer an educational experience besides a quality product. "We are going to arrange our facilities so that people can see the milking and care of the cows, and so that kids don't think milk comes from Turkey Hill," Vince said. "We are also planning on a menagerie of small farm animals in one corner of the farm."

Presently the buildings include a 40-cow tie stall barn, a hay barn large enough to hold hay for a 80 cow herd, the milk house and an area for future milk processing. A milking parlor and a second 40-cow tie stall barn will be built in the near future, Vince explained.

He added that the two tie stall barns will lie on opposite sides of the milking parlor with the hay barn directly behind the milking parlor. The future store will lie in front of the milking parlor and be set-up in such a manner to permit customers to view the milking and processing.

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The beginning of Tenpenny Farm. These are the make-shift washing facilities the Blascos used before their new barn was built.



Tenpenny Farm, named for Vince Blasco's construction background, is located in Ocean County New Jersey, halfway between New York, Philadelphia and Atlantic City. A second tie stall barn is planned to the right with the milking parlor being built to connect the stall barns and the hay barn.