

Hottensteins Reclaim DHIA Lead After Fire Destroys Barn

BY BARBARA MILLER

Lycoming Co. Correspondent

DUSHORE — It has been a long road back for Sullivan County dairy farmers, Denny and Dave Hottenstein, after a fire destroyed their barn in 1983. Recently, their herd of 65 registered Holstein cows again led the county in milk production with a DHIA average of 20,819 pounds of milk and 759 pounds of fat. The brothers are the fourth generation to operate the farm, purchasing it from their father, William, a few years ago.

On Aug. 1, 1983, lightning struck the Hottenstein's barn as they were doing their evening milking.

"It was instant, just flames a foot long on the posts," Dave recalls. "We were unsnapping cows and getting them out with the milkers still on," he continued, painting a graphic picture of events.

"It was as much scrambling as we've ever done in 10 minutes," drawled Denny in agreement.

Although the barn burned completely, the brothers were able to rescue all the livestock.

According to Denny, he had just been above in the old wooden bank barn admiring a mow of hay they had recently made. Two loads of freshly hauled sawdust occupied the barn floor along with a quantity of fertilizer.

"We have the best neighbors," Denny remarked, regarding the

aftermath of the fire.

Neighbors came that night, Dave explained, and fortunately they were able to load the cows right out of the fields onto trucks without much difficulty. The cows, divided among the neighbors for the first night, eventually were settled into Johnny Brown's barn where a few days before there had been a sale. Some of the cows had yet to be milked that night and it was in the early morning hours before the Hottensteins finally got things under control enough to climb into bed.

Not until 15 months later, in November 1984, after commuting at least twice daily to the Brown's barn seven miles away, were the brothers able to move their herd back to the farm. The cows moved back into a new metal-sided structure 40-by-190, equipped with 65 tie-stalls, four freshening pens, a new pipeline system, a new milkhouse with a 1,250 gallon bulk tank, and a small office.

Commuting to tend their herd every day for 15 months was hard enough, but another blow was the drastic 2,500 pound drop in monthly DHIA herd average the Hottensteins experienced. According to Denny, much of it was caused by irregular calving cycles.

"When you're not there you miss them," he observed, referring to the difficulty of determining when their cows were in heat.



Denny (left) and Dave stand between the rows of cows in their new 40-by-190 barn that has stalls for 65 cows. They recently regained the lead in the Sullivan County DHIA which they lost when their barn burnt in 1983.

It took a long time, Denny said, to get the cows back on a regular calving cycle. Additionally, they were forced to buy hay that year since their hay had burned, although they were able to use silage out of their silo.

There was no question in the minds of the brothers after the fire that they would continue to farm, but, Dave says, if he had things to do over again, he would do them differently.

"What we should have done is to have sold the cows right then. It was so far to drive and we had to buy every bit of hay. We were actually working for nothing." In summation, he said, financially, they would have been further ahead to have sold the cows and purchased others when the barn was completed.

The Hottensteins count five cows ranked Excellent and 23 ranked Very Good among their herd. One of their Excellent cows, Misty Crest Valiant Tavia, a 4 year old with a record of 29,398 pounds of milk, 1,134 pounds of fat, and 965 pounds of protein, was recently flushed in their initial attempt at embryo transplanting. Denny lists Ned Boy, Sexation and Valiant as some of their favorite bulls.

Concerning their high herd average, Denny gives much of the credit to family and friends.

"The herd average is not just us. It's our families behind us," he observes.

Denny's wife, Marie, helps with the barn chores by feeding hay and bedding the cows. Denny and Marie are the parents of three children, Melane, Wess and Carrie. Dave's wife June is employed as a school teacher.

Next, Denny mentions friends



Dave (left) and Denny Hottenstein pose with Misty-Crest Sexation Larisa, a 3-year-old that classified EX-91 EX-MS. She is one of five Excellent classified cow in their herd.

like Johnny Brown, Don Arthur and Lester Poust who have contributed advice and encouragement among other things. Then, "to make things tick," Denny says, he considers invaluable the excellent help of professionals such as Don Lauder Milch, veterinarian, Bob Pond, artificial inseminator, and Phil Rockwell, feed supplier.

Another factor contributing to their present milk production level, Dave says, is feeding high moisture corn four times a day.

"This past year is the first year we've fed high moisture corn year around," he notes.

In addition to the high moisture corn, the brothers report that their cows receive alfalfa/grass haylage twice a day, alfalfa/grass hay four or five times daily, and 10 pounds of corn silage each day. During the summer months the cows are turned out to pasture at night.

The weather, Denny says, is their worst problem. Living at an elevation of between 1,700 and 1,800 feet they experience a shorter, cooler, growing season than most Pennsylvanians. According to Denny, neighboring farmers experienced a "terrible frost" last June that killed their corn, and it is not unusual, he says, to have the first killing frost come in August. Therefore, the brothers plant an alfalfa grass mixture which under the very best of conditions. Denny

says, they can expect to cut only three times.

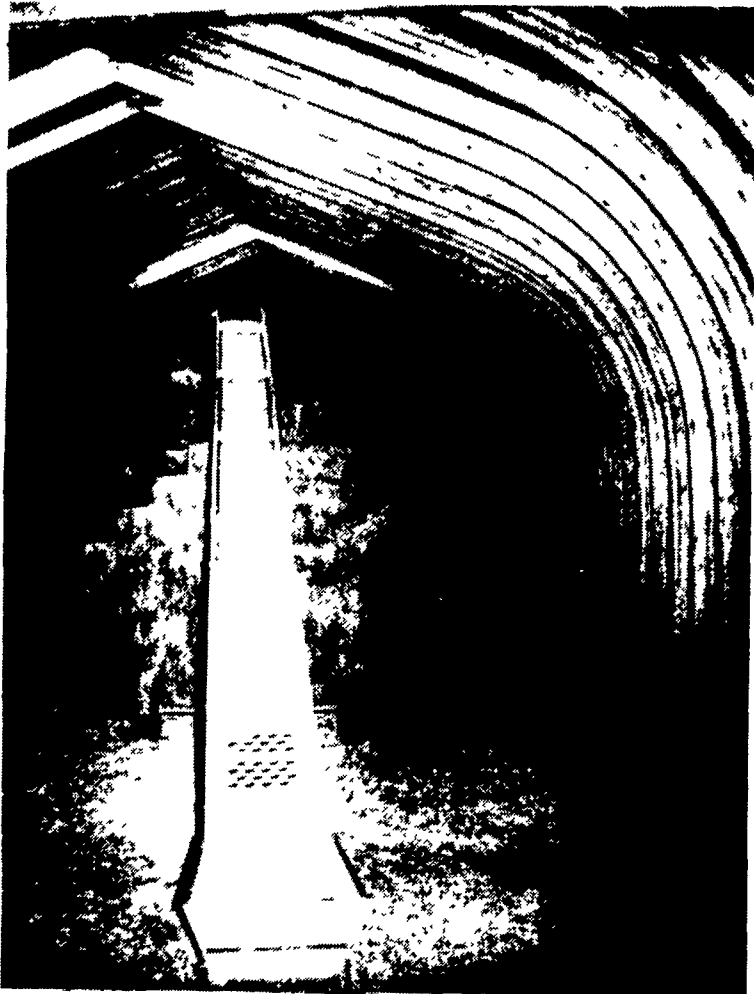
"Ninety-day corn is tops here and then we have to plant early," Denny adds.

One possible advantage of their cooler environment, Denny notes, is that they are not as likely to experience the adverse effects on milk production that hot weather can bring to a herd.

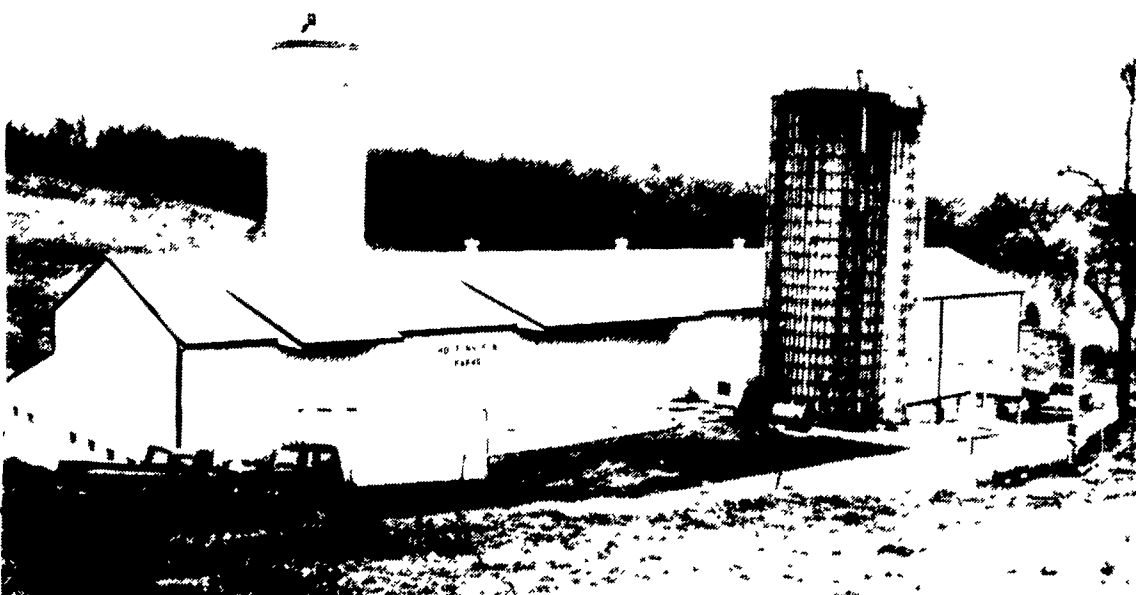
Regarding who does what around the farm, Denny smiles as he says, "Neither one of us is very good with machinery. We both like to work with the cattle."

Denny and Dave take time from their farm chores to enjoy hunting. Displayed in their office along with milk production trophies are the mounted heads of one 400-pound bear and five deer including one 10-point buck. And they claim to have a couple at the taxidermist.

Commenting upon what possible good may have come out of their disaster, Denny draws his thoughts together slowly and carefully. "Anytime anything happens to you it changes your perspective. We have a better barn to work with than we ever had. You really appreciate your friends and neighbors. You can't believe the hours they put in — they worked for days. And that's a good lesson learned," he concludes, "You can't put a price on your neighbors."



Uni arches were used in the construction of the top portion of the Hottenstein's new barn.



The Hottensteins of Dushore built this barn after lightning struck and destroyed their old barn. They moved into the new facility in November 1984.