

# Dairy Farmer Credits FFA With Much Of His Expertise

BY LISA RISSER

WAKEFIELD — "You have to know what you're talking about when you buy a \$4,000 cow. When I go out to buy a cow, I think I have enough knowledge," said Mark E. Welk, a dairy farmer living in Wakefield.

Part of that knowledge comes from being involved in vo-ag and FFA, specifically the dairy judging program. The rest of what Welk knows he learned from his father, Paul, who was a dairy judge during his high school days.

Welk, who has been in FFA since his freshman year of high school, was first place individually in reasons and in overall competition on the state level for three years in a row. One year, his dairy

judging team finished first in state and went on to finish third in the national competition. Welk finished fourteenth individually that year. His other teammates were Joe Delong and Kris Espenshade. Kris is now Welk's fiancee.

In addition, Welk was recently presented with the national FFA's highest award: the American Farmer Degree. To receive this honor, Welk had to have \$5,000 in assets and fill out a complex 22-page questionnaire which asked things like what activities he participated in, what his debt is, and what animals he possesses, their age, and their worth. He also was interviewed by a state FFA official.

Vo-ag and FFA taught Welk many things such as herd health,

which is important to him in his position as herdsman for his father's farm. It also will help when he and Kris marry, and they work her father's farm in Mechanics Grove on the halves.

"I learned different kinds of milking practices like dipping, washing, and drying their teats to keep down bacteria that would lead to mastitis," said Welk. "The drying part really seemed to help udder health. There was less chapping and cracking."

During his senior year, Welk

learned management skills, mostly dealing with taxes and depreciation. Welk feels that good management skills and proper money handling are essential to a farm's success.

The area in which Welk believes he gained the most is confidence. "FFA made me more outgoing," he explained. "It made me learn to speak out and say how I feel. In dairy judging, when you go in to give your reasons, you have to have confidence in what you say; you can't tell your reasons like

you're asking them. You have to be forceful."

Welk has been out of high school for three years now working with his father. He has remained involved in FFA and primarily helps younger members learn how to state their reasoning in dairy judging.

Welk will continue to use the knowledge he gained as a dairy judge in building up his herd of 20 milking cows and 20 heifers and in breeding a better cow.

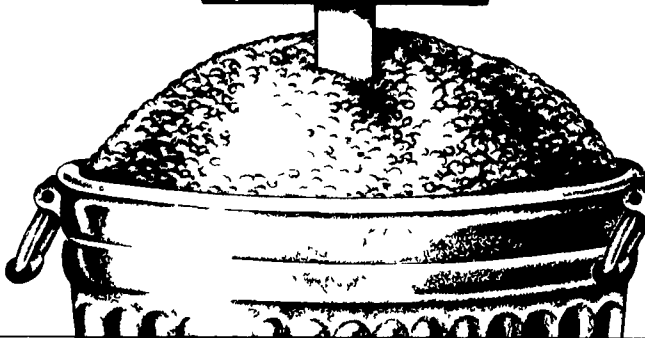


Mark and his father, Paul, look over one of their first-calf heifers.

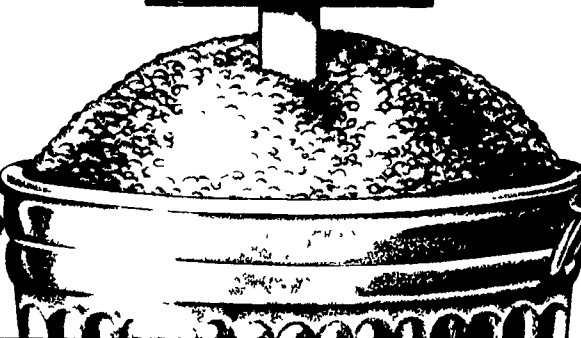
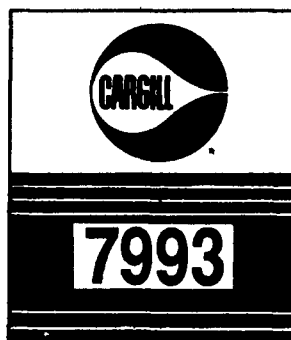


Mark Welk has been an FFA member since he was a freshman in high school. Currently working as a herdsman on his father's dairy farm, Mark was recently awarded the national FFA's highest award: the American Farmer Degree.

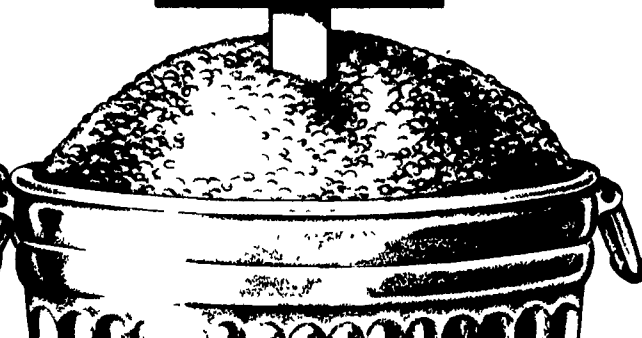
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