

To Farm Or Not To Farm? A Fourth Generation Question

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MEADVILLE — Earl and Bonnie Krider will look back on 1987 as a year of change.

Earl is the fourth generation to work the dairy farm on which he and wife Bonnie live with their three daughters, Kelly, Janelle and Kendra. His great-grandparents inherited some of the land and his grand-dad, Harry Krider, bought two additional parcels. Earl's dad, Edward, took over in 1972, and turned the operation over to Earl in 1983.

Earl had married Bonnie Walp in 1976. Bonnie's dad, a dairy farmer from nearby Venango, died when she was 12. So, although Bonnie thought she knew what she was getting into, being the wife of a dairy farmer was a lot different than what she remembered. With a young family to raise, an antiquated barn and equipment, the work was hard and didn't give them much quality time together as a family. But Bonnie quickly adds, "It's nice now."

The "now" she refers to is the improved quality of life they are experiencing since making the decision to remodel their barn.

A combination of business and family reasons brought about the remodeling. Said Earl, "We knew for a number of years that if we were going to continue dairying, it would be pretty hard to continue the way we were." The cows were milking pretty well, but they didn't have the room they needed for comfort and herd health."

What they now refer to as "the old system" was time-consuming and labor-intensive. Without a

barn cleaner, Earl and his dad had to manually clear manure two or three times a day. It was a tedious and back-breaking process.

So, in 1987, after years of thinking they should "do something about the barn," the Kriders began to think more seriously about it. Said Earl, "Sometimes the dairy situation didn't always look the brightest." They debated whether this was really a good time to put a lot of money into the farm, and whether they would get a return on their investment. To resolve these issues, they sought some outside advice.

To evaluate their options, Bonnie said, "We had to realize that we weren't perfect. We had to allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to allow someone to come in and say, 'Here's your strengths; here's your weaknesses.' To reach our potential, we had to ask for help."

Their veterinarian encouraged a change for the sake of herd health, but they also talked with County Agent Blaine Schlosser and their Farm Financial Consultant Kathy Cooper. Said Earl, "Blaine wouldn't steer us one way or the other. He knew our setup and knew as well as we did that we couldn't continue that way. . . . But he knew the dairy situation and pointed that out. He didn't know whether this was really the right time either."

Come spring, the Kriders began to compute the actual cost of the project. Earl was raised on the policy that you either pay cash for something or you don't do it. With remodeling costs and the major purchase of equipment, that's a pretty hard policy to follow. Still, they tried to be as prepared as possible for the additional costs. Said

Earl, "A large amount of our land is woodland . . . and we did sell some of that off this year to help us out financially." They also learned about some cost-sharing possibilities with ASCS.

The Kriders relied heavily on the advice of Kathy Cooper, their farm financial consultant. Cooper had been working with them since 1984 and had a few years of watching their finances. Said Bonnie, "She thought we were ready."

The final decision was theirs, but they valued the input of Schlosser and Cooper. Said Bonnie, "We had to realize that we couldn't make the decision on our own, that these other people had the expertise to advise us and counsel us."

But a bottom-line issue the Kriders had to resolve before undertaking a remodeling project of this magnitude and expense was whether they really wanted to spend the rest of their lives dairy farming.

They mulled over advice and did a lot of "soul searching," and communicating to understand each other's goals and commitments, trying to be honest with themselves and with each other. They knew changes had to be made.

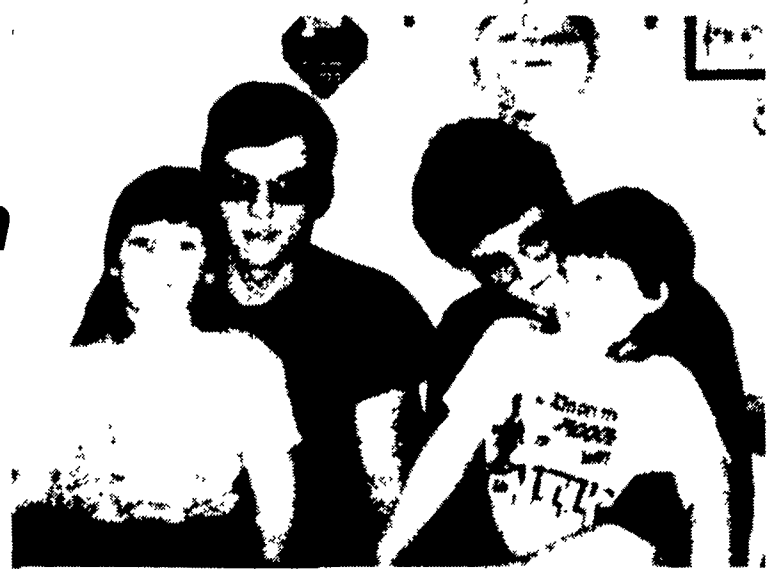
Bonnie said that the best counsel they got was to "put each other first and let the business take care of itself." Bonnie and Earl came to realize that the differences two people bring to a marriage can really be strengths if you turn them around and allow them to complement each other. And, with mutual respect, each person can use these complementary skills to enhance the running of the business. Bonnie said, "This was the real turning point for us to make the decision to stay in farming and really make it our life."

In the end, the balance to remain in farming was tipped by Earl's love of the land. Said Earl, "It's something I've done all my life. I've never done anything else. You have to stop and think: What could I do? If I could get another job, what would you be happy doing? . . . A lot of times I get sort of tired of this seven-day-a-week thing and long hours. It has its rewards, too, but I really wonder if I would be happy doing anything else."

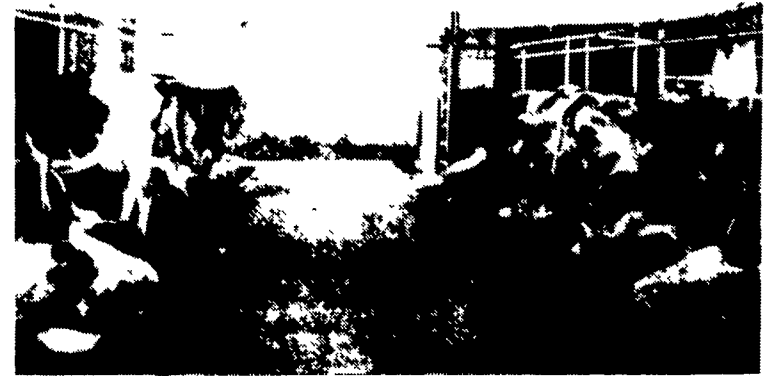
Bonnie says she did her best to make sure that's how Earl really felt, and, since it was important for Earl to have her support, to define her own feelings about being a farm wife as well. Earl feels strongly that farming is "a good honest way to make a living." He is comfortable working and raising his family close to the land.

So, with renewed commitment to each other and to dairy farming, the Kriders decided to take on the remodeling project. Still more decisions had to be made regarding materials and design. Equipment in the old facility needed replaced and the Kriders chose what some might consider "cadillac equipment." But considering Earl's age, 37, they chose materials designed to last for 30 years. They selected a design that remodeled the old barn and extended it with a new pole barn structure. Added features include a barn cleaning system, stainless steel stalls, tile mangers, and rubber mats for the cows. In addition, they widened the doorway to the silo, the center walkway, and the feed chutes to allow

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The Krider Family Minus One — Earl and Bonnie hold Kelly, 7 and Janelle, 5. Baby Kendra, 5 months old, was napping at the time the picture was taken.



NEW WIDER WALKWAYS — An extra wide walkways make it easy to get around in the remodeled structure.

Homestead Notes



EVERY-WHICH-WAY — A look into the old barn where there was no real order. The 40'x60' structure was remodeled and a 40'x48' pole barn added on. The old ceiling beams caught dust and cobwebs and were hard to keep clean.



CORNER TO CORNER — From corner of the original structure to the far corner of the new addition. The old beams held dust and cobwebs and were hard to keep clean. The new structure's interior is easy-to-clean vinyl.



MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK — Many helpers turned out to help on the day the center walkway was poured. From left, Ray Holabough, Ed Black, Ed Krider, Tom Quinn and Rick Nichols lend a hand.



DOING HER PART — Bonnie ponders her role of farm wife as she works on the farm books in her corner of the Krider bedroom.