

# Cow Crazy In Franklin County

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has grown to its present size and quality over a period of 14 years.

Jim grew up on a dairy farm in Montgomery County, Maryland, only 30 miles from Washington, D.C. His father's herd was all grade Holsteins. When, at age 10, Jim needed a 4-H animal, his parents said a registered Holstein cost too much, so they bought him a registered Ayrshire. Jim eventually built up a herd of 22 of them, including one that was awarded All-American honors.

He was accepted by the University of Maryland, but "was too hard-headed to go," he related. One factor in his decision not to attend college was that his father would have sold the dairy herd if he did not have Jim to help him. "I would have lost all the equity I'd built up in my Ayrshires," Jim explained.

Besides showing his Ayrshires throughout his 4-H years, Jim was also on a 4-H judging team. He was named fourth individual in the national contest, and his team placed second, missing a trip to Europe by three points.

After passing up the chance to

go to college, Jim judged his first show, the Hagerstown Fair, at age 19. He has since judged shows all over Maryland and Pennsylvania, judging all breeds. "A good cow is a good cow," he said, "it doesn't matter what color she is."

Although Nina's family did not live on a dairy farm, she was involved in 4-H, showing beef cattle and horses. She graduated from West Virginia University in Morgantown with a major in journalism and a minor in political science. She then went to work for National Geographic magazine, leaving in 1974 when she and Jim married.

The land Jim had farmed with his father was rented, and some of it was on 30-day notice. One year, developers dug test holes in one of the fields, and Jim could not plant corn there until June. Wanting to get away from urban sprawl and its problems, Jim and Nina moved to Mercersburg in southern Franklin County two months after their marriage.

On their first night in Franklin County, they milked 19 registered Ayrshires and three grade Holsteins. They rented the 137-acre

farm for a few years, then purchased it in 1978. In 1986 they purchased an adjoining 103-acre farm.

Their herd currently has a rolling herd average of 19,410 pounds of milk with a 3.8 percent test and 735 pounds of fat. Milking is done in a 16-stall stanchion barn with eight milkers.

Showing their cattle has become a large part of their operation. "We prepare all year for a show. In the back of our minds, the show is always coming," Jim said. "It goes back to when we breed the cow. We breed for show age calves." The optimum times for show calves to be born are March, June, September and December. "It doesn't hurt our income, either," Jim added. "If you freshen the majority of your cows then, they're not freshening in the heat of summer."

"It's worth it to us, even if we have to wait an extra heat period," Nina said. She cares for the calves, which are housed in individual hutches. All calves are on whole milk until three months of age. They also get a good quality calf starter. When Nina notices one that she thinks will develop into a good show calf, she pushes it a little. "You have to treat them as individuals, though," she said. "Some can't take more milk."

Calves on the Burdette farm don't get a lot of expensive additives in their feed. "We believe in fresh air, sunshine, and all the fresh water they can drink," Jim said. He is quick to credit the quality of their show calves to Nina's skill with them. "From the day the calf hits the ground, it's the way Nina takes care of it," he said.

As the animal gets older, it continues to receive special treatment before a show. While show cows are let out at night with the rest of the herd, they are kept in during the day, given extra hay, and allowed to become accustomed to show feed and show routine. "It would be hard to take a cow out of the herd, and show her with no preparation," Nina explained.

Nina has no regrets about caring for calves instead of writing articles. "I'm happy raising a family and farming," she said. "Being home with my boys is a luxury. I can always fall back on journalism when I want to. I used to be involved in a lot of volunteer work. Then one day, one of the boys said to me, 'Mom, you're never home. You're always at meetings.' I knew it was time to get my priorities straightened out."

She never has regretted moving 70 miles away from her family either. She and Jim agree that Franklin County is a wonderful place to live. "We couldn't have lucked into a better place," she said. "We have good neighbors." For Jim, an advantage of Franklin County is that an hour's drive from his farm will take him to the Metro for a swift ride into Washington D.C.

One of the Burdette family's favorite activities is showing their Holsteins. A blend of business and pleasure, showing requires a commitment of time and money, but all four Burdettes are enthusiastic about their business sideline/hobby, and they participate in it together. Kyle, 5, a kindergartner, has been showing calves in the open show at the fair since he was three. "We give the boys short-age calves to show," Nina explained. "We figure that while their interest is there, we'll let them show."

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The Burdette family: Justin, 9; Kyle, 5; Nina and Jim in their living room. The family is well known for their herd of fine Holsteins and for their skill in the show ring.



Justin brushes Collette, his 4-H project for this year. Justin is an important part of the family's farming operation. He feeds the show animals, unloads hay, waters the calves, helps switch sides when milking, and does the sweeping up.



Kyle, 5, takes good care of Panda, the calf he will show this summer.



James and Nina Burdette on the porch of their stone farmhouse.



The fireplace in the kitchen of the Burdette farmhouse is filled with antiques, and their favorite subject, cows.

## Franklin County Correspondent Bonnie Hellum Brechbill

Bonnie Brechbill resides on a 105-acre dairy farm in Edenville, Franklin County with her husband and four-year-old daughter. She has served as Lancaster Farming's Franklin County correspondent since December 1986.

Originally from Long Island, New York, she received her bachelor of arts degree in English from Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster. Bonnie has attended various writer's conferences, most recently the St. David's Christian Writer's Conference at St. David's, PA.

Her publication credits include: Farm and Ranch



Living, Festival Quarterly, Family Life, Grit, Secret Place, Chevrolet's Friends magazine, Pennsylvania, Purpose, and On the Line.