

Marlin Heisey says

When Farming Is In Your Blood, You Find A Way To Own A Farm

BY LOU ANN GOOD
LEBANON — "I hope you know you're the luckiest guy around," someone recently told Marlin Heisey.

The 34-year-old Lebanon County farmer nods, "I guess I am. Not too many 18-year-olds get a chance to farm their own farm."

It was 13 years ago when Heisey got his chance to farm.

"I had farming in my blood," he said. "I wanted to farm more than anything."

His dad had sold the family farm when Marlin was 15 and moved to Hagerstown, Md., where he pastored a church. Although still in school, Marlin found a farming job where he got up to milk at 4:30 each morning and hurried home each day for the evening milking for \$15 weekly. Then his boss had an accident, and Marlin did most of the duties for several months.

After graduation, Marlin worked in a store. "I hated it," he recalls. "I couldn't stand being pent up. I had farming in my blood. I knew that somehow or other, I was going to farm."

His brother told him about a Lebanon County farm that was for rent. Annie Kreider, now 95-years-old, was skeptical of renting her family homestead to a mere 18-year-old. Marlin persisted. It took some haggling until Marlin convinced her that while he might be young, his hard work and determination could make it go.

"I rented cheap, but I had to buy animals and all the barn equipment," Marlin said.

Convincing her was only the first obstacle. Banks were even more skeptical of loaning money to Marlin. Finding financing to purchase a herd of cows and the milking equipment seemed unsurmountable, but Marlin managed to find it and move into the house. Three months later, at age 19, he married Brenda Martin from Hagerstown.

Brenda did not have farming background and recalls that farm life was a big adjustment. "It seemed all his (Marlin's) attention went to the cows," she said.

At first, she watched him milk,

then she started washing the cows' udders and gradually progressed to milking.

Marlin purchased a herd of 44 cows and they had problems adjusting to a barn with gutters. The cows would fall, hurt their legs, and couldn't get back up.

Brenda said, "It seemed we were always needing to buy cows." The first year, they had only two heifer calves; the second year, three.

Heisey said, "It made things rough because we had to buy all our replacements." But during the third year, things took a change for the better, and they had 13 sets of heifer twins in one year.

Although it's 10 years later, the Heiseys' faces still light up when they talk about that third year. Things had started to turn around for them.

By the fourth year, the Heiseys had replaced all but a few of the original herd. "I didn't buy registered cows, but I looked for a cow that looks like she'll give milk and has enough strength to hang around for a while."

Heisey said, "Two years ago, I made it a goal never to buy cows again in my life. I'm sticking to it. I had too much bad luck with bought cows. It's much better to raise your own replacements, then they're used to you and the farm."

The first year in farming, Heisey shared equipment with his brother to grow corn and alfalfa. "We dragged the equipment back and forth for 15 miles. That was no picnic." During the second year, Heisey purchased his own equipment. Currently he continues to raise corn and alfalfa on the home farm and rents an additional 120 acres for barley and soybeans.

Because the farm had been rented for many years, facilities were outdated. Renters didn't want to spend their money on it. Heisey said, "I fixed up the old barn, and I built a free stall barn. It was a risk, because I didn't own the property, and we didn't have anything in writing. I knew if the owner would die, I could lose everything I put into it."

Fortunately, things turned out



The Heisey family gathers around the kitchen table. Brenda said, "The farm is the best place to raise the family." Her husband, Marlin, said, "Everybody always says that." But their children, (from left) Colette, David, Parke, and Chad, agree the life on the farm is great.

fine. Last year the Heiseys purchased the 120-acre farm from Annie Kreider. Now 95, she still lives in part of the farm house. She plans to stay as long as she can take care of herself.

Looking back over the past 13 years, Heisey said, "I was never scared that I wouldn't make it. I was just trying to make things go. I wanted to farm that bad, I always looked for a way. If you wholeheartedly want to farm and you know it, you will somehow make it work."

He added, "If the banker said, 'You can't do it,' I didn't argue. They know their business. You must watch your cash flow and debt."

The drought of '83 was the worst for them. Though many farmers were drastically affected by last year's drought, not Heisey. He explained, "When it was time for spring planting, all my tractors broke down. I was fit to be tied. But it turned out for the best. I planted late and got the rain just at the right time. Things really took off. It was my best soybean year ever."

Two years ago, Heisey started selling Hoffman seeds on the side. He said, "I never thought I'd make a salesman, but they came and ask me to do it. My grandfather had grown seed for the company all his life so I decided to carry on the family tradition."

When Heisey accepted the territory, he was assigned 12 customers, now he has 110.

He said, "When I told my former pastor that I was going to start selling seeds, he said, 'I remember when Hoffman seeds was the number one seed company in the county.'" Heisey paused, then added,

"His comment challenged me. I have a goal to make it (the company) number one again. There's a lot of competition. But Hoffman's got a good seed line and that's the bottom line. Customers want results and our seeds give them."

According to Heisey, "Milking cows and selling seeds are a good combination. When I get sick of milking, I go sell. If a customer gives me a hard time, I come back to the farm."

After years of gradually easing

into milking, Brenda can now handle it alone when her husband is gone. She admits with four children and the dairy she doesn't have time for much else. Her daughter Colette pipes up, "You like cooking."

Her mother wrinkles her nose, "I get tired of cooking. I just do."

Colette looked suprised and stated emphatically, "You're a good cook."

The Heiseys now have four

children: Colette, 9; Parke, 8; Chad, 3; and David 1½ years.

For the Heisey family, things are going smoother than the first couple of years when they started. Heisey emphasizes, "In farming, you can't ever say you made it. You're always walking a tightrope between disaster and good fortune—things can go either way so easily."

He added, "I do my best on what I can control; the other 80 percent I can't control so I just live with it."

Farm Safety Course Offered To Teenagers

NEWARK (Delaware) — "Few farm parents would ever dream of turning a teenager loose in a gambling casino," says Ron Jester, University of Delaware Extension safety specialist. "Yet their teens are gambling with much higher stakes when they operate a tractor with a minimum amount of instruction and little or no supervision."

The many needless accidents involving youth on our farms can be prevented, Jester says. Safety training and more supervision can do much to reduce the high accident rate in this age group, which is about twice the rate for adults.

Delaware Cooperative Extension is offering a safety training course in March for teenagers who want to work on farms this summer.

According to Ron Jester, federal law prohibits youth under 16 from working in certain hazardous agricultural operations unless they have an exemption certificate from a safety training course. By completing this course, 14- and 15-year-old farm workers can receive exemptions. Although youngsters working on their parents' farms don't need a certificate, Jester recommends the course for all farm youth.

Hazardous jobs closed to youths without safety training

include:

- * operating a tractor with more than 20-horsepower,
- * operating or assisting with the operation of most farm machinery,
- * operating or assisting with trenchers, forklifts, chain saws and other types of machines,
- * working inside airtight produce and grain storage areas or silos,
- * working at high elevations,
- * handling hazardous materials,
- * working in pens with breeding stock,
- * handling explosives or anhydrous ammonia,
- * working in heavy timber operations,
- * transporting passengers in vehicles on farm property,
- * riding on a tractor as a passenger or helper.

The training program will be a correspondence course with three formal classes. The final class will include written tests and a tractor driving test. Classes will be held at night, and the sites will be determined after applications are in.

To register, call the county Extension office in Georgetown (856-7303), Dover (697-4000) or Newark (451-2506), by February 28.



Marlin and Brenda Heisey stand in front of their Lebanon County farmhouse. Their children are, from left, Parke, 8; Chad, 3; David, 1; and Colette 9.