

# The Good Stewards of Junge Farms

BY VAL VANTASSEL

Berks Co. Correspondent

NEW TRIPOLI (Lehigh Co.)

— Ray and Karen Moyer met 43 years ago... in a hospital nursery.

"We were born five days apart. We didn't meet again until junior high school. You know I never went out with anyone else," Ray reminisced while sitting at the huge dining room table in their New Tripoli farmhouse.

Karen laughed. "I always knew he was going to be a farmer. Even when we went on a date to the drive-in. Instead of doing what the other kids did, Ray was calculating just how he could afford to buy a farm."

Settled comfortably in the large dining room, surrounded by their children and their families it's hard to imagine Ray and Karen anywhere but at Junge Farms, a diverse dairy corporation in Lehigh County. Just how these would-be farm owners became farm managers and stewards of the land began in 1969.

The Moyers nearly realized their dream when they put a down payment on a Lycoming Co. farm in 1969. "I was following my brothers' footsteps. We grew up in Bucks County and two of my brothers had bought farms upstate. We were all set to buy the place and the farmer backed out," Ray explained.

"And Leann, our oldest daughter, was due in five weeks," Karen added.

Disappointed, but unwilling to accept defeat, the couple went to Blooming Glen where Ray found work with a local contractor. "I was building houses when I found out about the job with Junge Farms. Reverend Robert Junge learned about our interest in farming from a friend of our minister's. He called and offered us the position but I told him I still wanted to buy my own farm."

Despite the refusal, Rev. Junge kept in touch with the Moyers. "The day I decided to take the job I had pleurisy but I went to the



The main farm is one of six farms managed by the Moyers for Junge Farms Inc. of New Tripoli. In addition to the six

farms, the Moyers manage 80 head of registered Holsteins and almost 600 acres of cropland.

construction site anyway. It was cold and I hit my thumb with a hammer. That was it, we decided that we'd rather be farming," Ray said with a smile.

"We agreed to come up and look at the place. Then we signed a contract to stay a year. And that's all we really planned to be here," Karen said.

The Moyers arrived at the farm in December of 1969. The last 20 years have seen a lot of changes particularly in the dairy operation.

"We started with a commercial herd of 40 animals. Rev. Junge and his family are very nice people. They have allowed us to do the farming as we see fit. Rev. Junge has given us the authority to do the buying and selling, but we like to keep in close contact with him. In fact we've been on the phone three times today," Ray said.



The Moyer family includes (from left) Suzann, Karen holding her grandson, Cody Moyer, Ray with grandson Michael Moyer, Jr., Keena and Jason Moyer and Michael Moyer, Sr. Daughter Leann and nephew Jay Garls are missing from the picture.

Today, Junge Farms Inc. consists of six farms with 80 registered Holsteins in the milking string. The Moyers are also managing over 100 acres of cropland, 600 of which belong to the operation.

"We have approximately 450 acres of corn, 300 acres of hay, 225 acres of soybeans and 160 acres of wheat. This is the first year we won't be planting oats. We use the straw and this year we don't need any," Ray said.

According to Moyer, much of the grain is sold including all of the wheat and about half of the soybeans. The rest is fed on the farm. Last year 374 tons of hay were harvested in the operation.

## Top Priority — Cows

Despite the large scale crop enterprise, it is the cows that are Ray's top priority. "Cows and the barn work come first."

The main farm is an aesthetic delight, the picture of what agriculturists would like consumers to think of every time the word farm is mentioned. Not only is it pretty, but odorless. According to Karen manure is stored in an earthen dam and spread twice a year. The same

system is employed at the heifer facility.

It is the Moyers' careful attention to detail that has resulted in a rolling herd average of 21,950 pounds of milk with 865 pounds butterfat. Last year Junge Farms was listed second on the Berks DHIA for butterfat. "We've been first for the last couple of months, but we'll just have to wait and see the results in September," Ray said.

"It really depends on what happens in the summer. Things kind of die then," Ray and Karen's son Jason said.

Ray was quick to point out that it isn't that the animals die. "We have lots of fall and winter animals, but by summer most of the herd is milked off."

The Moyers are pleased with the herd average which is 26,000m for animals in second

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Harley Shaner, the Moyer's hard-working hired hand demonstrates his valuable skills.

## Berks County Correspondent

Val VanTassel —

Val VanTassel recently joined *Lancaster Farming* as the Berks County correspondent.

VanTassel lives with her husband, Lyn, and her sons, Zach, age 3, and 9-week-old Ethan, in Hamburg.

VanTassel was raised on a small dairy farm in upstate New York. She graduated from Cornell University in 1982 and spent two years working for the *Hamburg Item* before taking time off to raise her children.

Prior to joining the *Lancaster Farming* staff, she wrote articles for other dairy publications.

She is looking forward to the fair season, farm visits and meeting the folks in Berks, Lehigh and Schuylkill counties.

"Located in the southern tip of Berks County, I hope to cover events in all three areas. Readers can help me by calling me at (215) 562-5018 with their news needs and story ideas," said VanTassel.