

No Room For Compromise At Apple Way Farm

BY PAT PURCELL

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — Roger and Mary Sprague don't put anything in their milk tank that they wouldn't drink themselves. As a result, for the past 17 years they have received quality premiums for producing milk of the finest quality - pure and fresh.

"In the 15 years we've been shipping milk, we've gotten our quality premiums every month except for seven in all of those years," said Roger with pride.

It's not what they do at Apple Way Farm that makes them one of the 39 members of the Atlantic Dairy Cooperative to earn their quality premiums for 12 consecutive months. It's how they do it.

"You have to do everything right. And if anyone tells you they have the product to solve all your problems, they are wrong," said Guy, Roger and Mary's son.

Roger was 38 when he began farming. The only farm experience he had, came from working on his grandfather's farm when he was a young boy. Mary was 'very much a city girl', having grown up in Letchworth, England, a town about the size of Gettysburg, located 30 miles outside of London. They met while Roger was stationed in London and married in 1958. Much had changed in dairy farming during those 20 years Roger had been away from the farm life. Most of those years he had spent in the Air Force and government service.

In 1973 Roger and Mary purchased the Apple Way Farm, a 130-acre fruit farm with no dairy facilities. They had much to do to ready their new home for dairy cows. Roger and Guy laid the block, installed the pipeline and all the electrical work for their parlor which continues to serve the Spragues today. They added a silo and built a freestall barn and 40 cows to fill it.

"I thought I had all the answers when I started farming, but I learned very quickly that I did not," Roger readily admits. "A lot had changed in farming. When I left my grandfather's farm we were still using horses."

By January of 1974, Apple Way Farm was shipping milk. Today, they milk 80 cows, own 130 acres and farm an additional 280 acres. Guy, returned to the farm after graduating with a degree from Penn State in electrical engineering and now he has his own herd of 22 registered cattle.

Production at Apple Way is 15,273 pounds. Before the series of droughts during the past three years, production hovered at 16,000 pounds.

"We could make more milk than we are making now, but not as cheap," said Roger. "Before the drought 17 percent of the milk check went for grain and the herd was producing over 16,000

quality milk.

"I drive the cows in at 4 a.m. If I see a cow with a problem I call the vet immediately," said Roger. "We do pay attention to detail around here. In 1985 we hit 93 percent of the detectable heats. I guess that's pretty good."

Their quick attention pays off. They don't lose cows to coliform mastitis at Apple Way Farm. They last cows lost were in 1973 and they were not lost to coliform mastitis. They use a strip cup twice a day, use the California test and examine their DHIA somatic cell count report each month. All cows are cultured and dry treated.

Guy's herd ranks in the top three producers on the somatic cell count honor roll for Adams County, DHIA. Roger would also make the list except for several older cows in his herd which tend to keep him off the honor roll.

They bed with green sawdust, but keep mastitis infections down.

"The vet tells us we could do better with straw or kiln dried sawdust," said Roger. The barn is scraped once a day and manure is raked out of the dirt beds at least twice a day.

In the parlor, cows are washed with a damp cloth wet with an iodine and water solution. A separate reusable towel is used and all are washed and dried daily. Roger feels the heat from the dryer sterilizes the towels.

They use strip cups. There are no automatic take offs in their double-three parlor, but careful attention to the milk flow prevents over milking and all udders are in good condition. Of first priority in the parlor, post dip is sprayed immediately after the milkers come off.

Two different dips are used. The iodine solution is used most frequently, but when it gets muddy around the farm as it did after the two weeks of steady rain they had recently, the Spragues use a barrier dip. It is much thicker and has a lot more staying power than the normal dip.

"We make sure we feed our cows enough, but we don't feed them too much because we want them to stay on their feet long enough in the barn to eat and give their teat sphincter muscles time to contract and close the opening of the teat canal," said Roger.

Equipment is disassembled and cleaned twice a day, with detergent and acid.

"We try very hard to do all the things that need to be done and doing what's most important first," said Guy.

All milk is tested before it goes back into the tank. Roger and Mary are proud to say they have never had to dump a tank of milk. Pro-pounds."

The equipment is not new. The milking equipment was 20 years old when Roger and Guy installed

them 15 years ago. Guy says that's an advantage in one way. The equipment is simple to repair. However, the electronic controls are new as are the pipeline, tank and washer. Roger and Guy do check the system frequently and make repairs. Guy's degree in electrical engineering comes in handy.

There are several drawbacks to the system, Guy admits, "We do not have as big of pipeline as we should. The pipeline is 1 1/2", the pulsator line is 1 1/4", and the supply line is 1 1/2". None of which are supposed to be adequate for six units," said Roger. "But the vet checked them recently and the specs were okay."

It works for Spragues, according to Roger, because their parlor is very compact.

"We are just not moving the milk as far as most people have to. And there are not as many joints, so there are not as many leaks," said Roger.

Keeping somatic cell count low as well as the levels of P.I. and standard plate count is the result of setting priorities and their attention to detail.

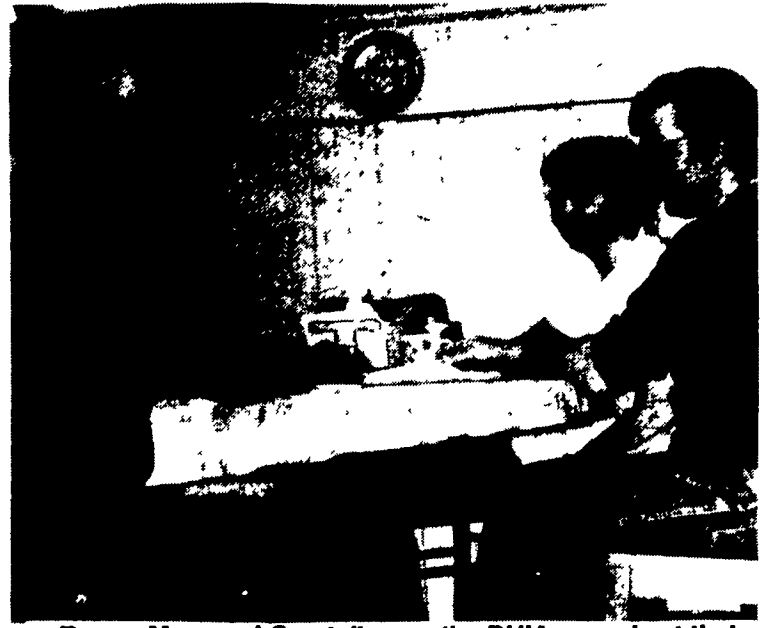
Inflations are changed every eight weeks. Roger buys soaps, detergents, and sanitizers by how well they work. He follows closely the sales representative's recommendations and the wash water temperature is always at the required level.

In the parlor, red bands on cows mark the cows whose milk is not to go into the tank. The calendar in the parlor is a control center. Roger and Guy record dates and times when treatment was begun or ended and withdrawal periods.

"Communication is everything here," said Roger. "We may not see each other between milkings. I milk in the mornings and Guy milks at night, so we've got to know what the other one is doing."

"We don't trust luck. Everything in the system has to work," said Roger. "No point goes unchecked."

The Apple Way herd is on a monthly herd check. The calving interval is 13.1 months. The last three years Sprague's herd has been affected by the drought. The stress affects the reproduction system by shutting it down. But top priority here is cow health and producing a quality product and protecting their cows' health are priority at Apple Way Farm. The cow does not go back into the milking herd until she is ready and not before.



Roger, Mary and Guy talk over the DHIA records at their kitchen table. Roger admits they could produce more milk with their 80 head milking herd, but not for the same price per CWT. they do now.



This vacuum line pressure valve is part of the original equipment installed at the Apple Way Farm more than 15 years ago. It may be vintage equipment, but the Spragues' careful attention to performance keeps this system in top shape and up to their veterinarian's specifications.

There is no room for compromise at Apple Way Farm, because the Spragues don't put anything in their milk tank that they wouldn't drink themselves. Now, that's REAL milk.



With Guy milking in the evening and Roger milking in the morning, the calendar in the milking parlor has become their communication control center. A cow's treatment and health record are kept on the calendar for each to refer to before milking begins.

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District 3 — Noah N. Sensing, Quarryville, PA

District 3 — Abner L. & Sarah B. Stoltzfus, Peach Bottom, PA

District 3 — Donsdell Farm, Peach Bottom, PA

District 5 — Frey Dairy Farms Inc., Conestoga, PA

District 6 — Dan F. & Mary S. Petersheim, Gordonville, PA

District 7 — John K. Peters, Manheim, PA

District 9 — Green Acres Farm, Lewes, DE

District 13 — Rodney D. & Marlene W. Reese, Port Matilda, PA

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