

Dairy Of Distinction Winners Rebuild After Two Arsonist-Set Fires

BY LOU ANN GOOD
ELIZABETHTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — Fire!

The word shoots a flame of fear through farmers. It's one of the worst catastrophies a farmer can face.

The Glen Longenecker family of Elizabethtown has faced it twice.

In 1962, five minutes after the family had crawled into bed, an explosion rocked their house and sent them racing to the windows where they saw hungry flames leap from their barn.

On July 24, 1988, the family was at church when the message came that their barn was on fire.

By the time they made the five minute return to home, the blackened barn timbers had already fallen.

Both fires were considered suspicious. Last year's fire was ruled arson.

The fear of fire can't compare with the hot surge of anger that flashes through a farmer when he hears the word arson.

"It's all so senseless," Glen Longenecker remarked. "If fire results from lightening or other natural ways, it's bad; but when it starts from arson..." his voice trailed off, then he cleared his throat, shrugged and said, "You learn to accept it and live through it...to get rid of bitterness."

His wife Sharon agreed. "You can't let those negative feelings control you. Still...it would be nice if the arsonist would be caught to spare others from going through the same thing."

Before the Longeneckers had left for church on that fateful Sunday morning, they had scanned their buildings and even drove around the back of the barn since the milk truck was blocking the

driveway. They hadn't noticed anything suspicious, but when the driver closed his truck door several minutes later, he smelled smoke and then noticed pitch black smoke rolling out of the hay mound.

Quickly the driver called the fire company and then let the cows and steers outside.

The arid black smoke soon turned white, which is a signal that the fire was petroleum set since hay burns white. Neighbors also reported seeing a suspicious pick-up parked in the area.

"The milkman was our hero of the hour," Sharon said.

Glen said, "It's a good thing, I wasn't here, because I would have had a hard time letting out the steers."

Although the steer building did not burn, the steers would have suffered smoke inhalation if they hadn't been moved.

The fire raged out of control before any of the equipment could be removed.

"That's another reason why it's good I wasn't here," Glen said. "Otherwise I would have tried to remove the equipment and that would have been too dangerous."

Three weeks before the last fire, the Longeneckers had their 1,000 foot long driveway paved. The heavy fire equipment made a mess of the blacktop and deep gullies formed in it.

It's the side affects of the fire that often are the hardest with which to cope.

Glen said, "Fire really sets you back. Insurance doesn't even cover half of the expenses caused by a fire."

Although the steers were brought back and temporary water lines and electrical hookups were done, the Longeneckers decided to sell their cows and buy new ones



Now that the barn has been rebuilt, the Longenecker family can smile. They are standing in front of the brick milkhouse and barn that they built by themselves. Left to right: Dolly, Jamie, Glen and Sharon.

after the barn was rebuilt.

"It's more mess than it's worth trying to rebuild and milk at the same time," Glen said.

The barn that was destroyed by fire was the Longenecker's joy.

In 1962, the family had torn the barn down from its original Millersville farm. The massive 50x100-foot structure was unique. "You couldn't find one like it in a million," Glen bragged. Every time he walked inside, he remembers feeling awed by the 50-foot rafters that were all in one piece.

"The barn we have now looks like a heap of junk compared to the old one," Glen said.

After the second fire, the Longeneckers learned that arsonists are attracted to huge barns—the bigger the better. Consequently they settled for an unpretentious 47x82-foot barn.

The Longeneckers rebuilt the barn themselves. Two crews helped them lay the block for the foundation and the brick milkhouse.

Sharon said, "We called the two crews the day and the night crews, but we (our family) worked on both of them."

The family thought brick laying was fun.

Their 16-year-old daughter Dolly said of the experience, "Brick laying is not as hard on the back as laying block."

Glen admits that he can do almost anything. He credits his grandpa, who was a carpenter, for passing on handyman skills. Glen said that when he finds out how much he would need to pay someone else to do it, he figures he'll do it himself.

Earlier the family had built the hog barns and put in a liquid manure system.

On January 30, 1989, six months after the fire, the Longeneckers finished the barn building and began milking with their new herd. They kept only one of the original herd.

Asked if the cow was a top producer, the family roars with laughter and answers, "No, it's just



When it came to deciding whether or not to keep the original herd, only this one, named 111, was deemed worthy enough to keep. Emotional attachment won over productivity, for Jamie, who daily feeds 111 candy bars, laughs when asked if 111 is a good producer. Jamie said, "111 is special because she's so tame you can sit on her and she licks you all over enough to give you a bath."

spoiled." The family pampers the cow and hand feeds her candy bars.

Despite the setbacks caused by fire, the Longeneckers and their two children, Jamie, 19; and Dolly, 16; have rebuilt their dairy and, this year, earned a dairy of distinction award for their farm of 117 acres and they rent an additional 180 acres on which they grow corn, alfalfa, grain, soybeans and barley.

Their interests are diversified with 70 cows, 1,500 swine, and 90 steers. Dolly reminds her father that she also raises 20 turkeys, 12 chickens, 5 roosters, and 35 cats.

Not only do the Longeneckers

take care of building and repairs, they also do most of their vet work. Sharon also does AI work.

She said, "Glen wanted me to go to school to learn how to check pregnancies, but I refused."

She winked and said, "The more I learn, the more work I have to do."

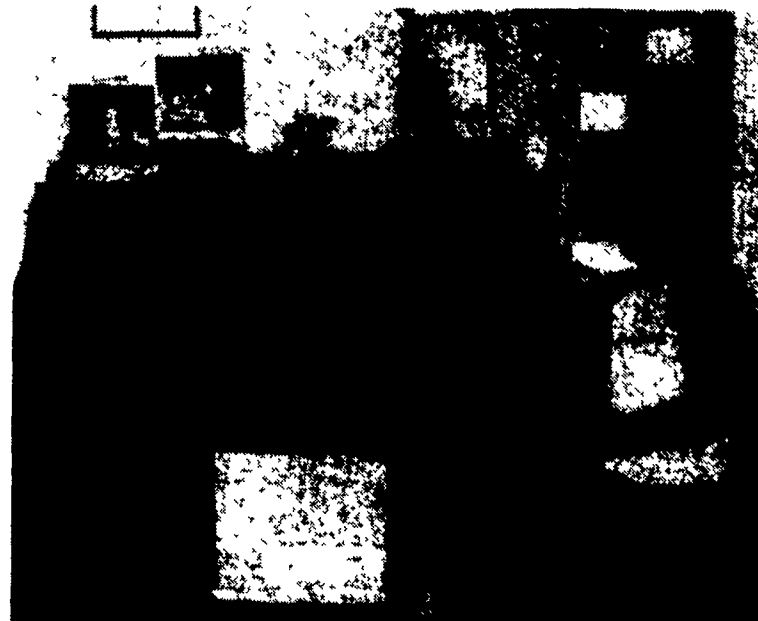
Jamie loves the farm and enjoys wood working in between times. He builds roll top desks, picnic tables and clocks. Recently Jamie married and commutes from his apartment five miles away. The farm is a two-family operation.

When fire destroyed their barns,

(Turn to Page B4)



Dolly finds turkey raising is a good, profitable hobby unlike caring for her 35 cats. When fire destroyed their barn, cat litters, they didn't know existed, came running out. Even if cats aren't profitable, Dolly forms a special attachment to them, that she isn't about to relinquish.



Nineteen-year-old Jamie inherited his dad's handy-man traits. Jamie has many several of these roll-top desks, picnic tables and other woodworking projects.

Homestead Notes