

Easter Seal Kids

(Continued from Page B10)

Robin stressed cleanliness to the group. "We take a lot of care with the milk because it's going to some very important people...you!

The kids then got a peek at the bulk tank while counselors pushed Zach and Leo around the barn to look in the feeding area. Kathy Phillips, Robin's cousin and sister-in-law, explained that milk has to be cooled. "We have just a few hours to get it to the right temperature or we can't sell the milk," he said.

Then Robin stood on the stairs above the group, pointed to her blue sneakers and said, "Now I'm not going to get my sneakers dirty and I don't want you to get yours dirty either. Everyone who keeps their sneakers clean gets a prize at the end of the tour."

The youngsters with some help climbed the three stairs and walked into the feeding area. Courtney Luckenbill, a spunky nine-year-old wanted to follow the group into the feeding area but her crutches made the going tough. Policeman Don hoisted her on his back and the two happily marched into the main barn to pet the cows.

Robin's Jerseys are quite tame and came out to greet the visitors when she turned on the feeder. Sarah Milanen held out her hand one one of the cows nosed over for a sniff. Other animals followed suit and several kids had a chance to pat the cows.

The group left the barn and stepped back into the sun. The lads imitated Robin's famous chicken walk and cleaned their shoes. Then they sauntered over for a sniff of silage. She explained its importance while campers wrinkled their noses.

Youngsters, helpers and counselors then crowded around the calf hutches for the chance to bottle feed three little Jerseys. Some kids leaned over the top of the fence while the calves sucked to their hearts content. Others gazed between the planks, but before the bottles were finished everyone had a chance to feed a calf.

Somewhere between the silage, the calves, and a trip to the heifer barn C.J. discovered Dairy Princess Ann Mitchell. "I just love her," he confided later.

Outstretched hands fed happy heifers a bit of grain at the next stop and the kids stroked the cats that loafed on bales of hay. Finally the crew trooped back to the picnic table to hear a presentation by Dairy Princess Ann on the importance of drinking milk.

The tour wound up with ice cream and pony rides. While not everyone was ready to ride the pony, Zach was one of the first in line. Although he is a strapping lad, the counselors and helpers were able to lift him onto the animal and Amy led him for a walk down the drive and around the trees. At first Zach seemed a bit reserved with the pony but by the return trip his face was wreathed in smiles.

Asked if the pony was his favorite part of the tour, he replied, "I liked everything."

Mark concurred. This is a great place for animals," he added.

Courtney, a fourth grader at Whitfield Elementary said, "I liked everything too. It's nice to learn how milk is produced."

Stacey, seven years old, and Sarah, 11 years old, both thought that milking the cow was the nearest thing about the tour. "I really liked feeling the calves too," Sar-

ah added taking another bite of ice cream.

"Joel likes the animals," Sheri Keuscher, the head counselor at Camp Lily said.

It was Camp Lily's first trip to Robin's farm. "I learned about it from the kindergarten teacher at the school," Sheri explained. Sheri is an aide in a special needs class at the 12th and Marion School in the Reading School District. "This was a really successful tour. I'm going to recommend that the class visit the farm next spring."

Sheri believes it would be great for other farmers to open their farms for visits from the disabled. She has some advice for those interested in doing so. "Accessibility is important. Here Zach and Joel could see everything despite their wheelchairs. We had five counselors with the group, but in a 'normal' class situation you might only have two teachers and maybe an aide. Get lots of volunteers to make your farm tour a success."

Robin agreed. "We just love doing farm tours and I think more farmers should do them. When we have a group like Camp Lily I do try to get extra helpers. I like to have a one to one ratio. I also like to have a lot of animals around where the kids can get to them. It's more like a petting zoo."

Robin stresses cleanliness on all her tours. "We want to promote milk as a healthy product so we like things to be really clean. After

all you only get one chance to make a first impression."

Another thing farmers don't think about sometimes is flies. We keep the manure cleaned up in our barns and keep insecticide on our walls so we don't have much of a problem with it but it is something that city folks really notice. Most of us farmers don't even think about it.

The kids gave Robin a big thank you, before loading into the vans and driving away waving and smiling.

Dairy Princess Ann Mitchell summed up the feelings of the helpers. "The kids were so enthusiastic and alert. I felt I really got a chance to know these guys which you don't get to do in the bigger groups. After the first couple of minutes I didn't even notice their disabilities. I sure hope other farmers get involved in tours like this one. It was great!"

Robin said, "I'm really glad they had a chance to come to the farm. Dave and I love to have visitors. As Dave says they will always be welcome. We're glad to have the type of animals that people can get close to. We've been running tours since the second week of May and we've had 600 kids so far this year. That doesn't count the tours that were cancelled because of rain. And the number goes up every year. It would be great for more farmers to run tours so more kids could visit farms."



Robin Phillips wears her milking bonnet to instruct visitors in the fine art of milking.



Stacey Mountz, 7, takes a turn at milking a cow while her friends cheer her on.

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