

# Dairy Farmer's Involvement Goes Beyond Fenceline

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The Association's growth became evident this past weekend at the first Pennsylvania Ayrshire Breeders Convention.

During the convention, many new awards and contests were instituted. These features, the Pennsylvania Spring Sale Sweepstakes, the Pennsylvania Ayrshire Hall of Fame, and the 1992 Pennsylvania Ayrshire Futurity program, help to publicize the Ayrshire animal and encourage more people to become involved with the breed. This purpose falls in line with the National organization's motto, "...devoted to the preservation of records and the promotion of the Ayrshire breed."

Rodgers currently serving on the National Promotions Committee, helped to develop the handbook "Ayrshires of the 1990s," which is "a historical yet forward-looking promotional item." This will be unveiled at the National meeting April 11-14. Its purpose is "to update all who have an interest in the Ayrshire cow, her potential and her history."

John mentions that 80 percent of the world's cattle are red and white. The Ayrshire is second in pounds of protein; "which means our protein test along with the pounds of milk that our cows produce rank us second in pounds of protein," he said.

The key lies in "exploiting" the good characteristics of the Ayrshire cow while improving on their shortcomings.

The Ayrshire industry's greatest challenge lies in bull proving. In the Hoard's Dairyman's list of bulls, Ayrshire bulls are on the bottom of the list.

But progress is being made. "In January, 12 new bulls got in the top listing of Ayrshire bulls. That means they replaced a lot of bulls. That's exciting for a little breed of 17,000 cows on test," Rodgers said. He rises to the challenge by serving on the National Ayrshire Breeders Genetic Improvement committee.

The link between John Rodgers and Ayrshires did not begin with his first herd in 1955. Ayrshires originated in Scotland as did Rodgers' ancestors.

In 1736, James Alexander, as a 10-year-old, emigrated from Ireland with his parents who were Scottish. That same year, William

Penn's son, John, and his grandsons, Thomas and Richard purchased land from the Indians.

In 1755, James Alexander received a warrant for 1,000 acres from the land office in Philadelphia.

John Reed Rodgers is the eighth generation living on this same land in Big Valley. Last year, when Mifflin County celebrated its Bicentennial, Rodgers received a Bicentennial Farm Award, "which means it has been in our family for over 200 years," he said.

"It's still that land that I enjoy being a part of - anything that is growing."

Rodgers is a charter member of the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council, an organization that will soon be 30 years old. Presently he is executive vice president of the American Forage and Grassland Council.

Rodgers' 450 acres consists of the main farm, Plum Bottom, with 250 acres, some mountain ground, and a second 100-acre farm where his daughter Gay lives.

The woodland acres are under the American Tree Farm Management. Ten years ago, 400 black walnut trees were planted and two years ago, an additional 1,750 were planted along with 3,000 white pines and 500 locusts.

With the main farm facilities rented out, Rodgers' 70-cow purebred Ayrshire herd is housed at the second farm.

"I'm sure that my Ayrshire involvement came about because my uncle Reed Hayes was an Ayrshire breeder," Rodgers explained.

Following suit, Rodgers began with Ayrshires, a pure-bred herd, in 1955, two of which were imported from Scotland.

"In 1965, we began thinking about building a larger barn and expanding our farm operation. And so when we did that, I bought Holsteins because I could go right down the street to my neighbors and buy them without traveling around, all over the world... we would need 250 cows!"

In 1985, Rodgers bought an Ayrshire for the second time with the "intent to get involved with Ayrshires and with Ayrshire people, and be part of what's happening with the Ayrshire breed."

John then reoriented and re-

educated himself as to what had taken place in the past 20 years. He traveled to other Ayrshire farms and chose a few cows as the foundation for his present herd.

One of the highlights of Rodgers' Ayrshire "career" took place last year when he was asked to be the guest speaker at the Ayrshire Cattle Society's Annual Conference in Stranraer, Scotland. Later, in his "Letter From America" to their Ayrshire Journal, John wrote:

"It was indeed a thrill to return to the land that my ancestors immigrated from 253 years ago.

"My question to us as Ayrshire breeders is what are we doing for the future of the breed?...What are we doing to stimulate and encour-

age young folks to want to be associated with Ayrshires in the future?"

When speaking of the future, John stresses involvement. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get - we make a life by what we give!" - a statement Rodgers said he firmly believes in.

It seems to follow that his involvement goes beyond Ayrshires.

"I have been president of the Penn State Ag Advisory Council and through that involvement, I get to know a lot of people in the state of Pennsylvania and a lot of people at Penn State. And through that association, and with the Dale Carnegie association (He is an

instructor). I've put together a Dale Carnegie relationship with 4-H clubs in Pennsylvania. And it's been very stimulating for me to be involved in the instruction of 200 kids so far."


Rodgers said he hopes that, in 10 years, Ayrshires in general reach an average of 18,000 pounds of milk. "Who knows what else is going to come along in the next 10 years" to aid farmers towards superior management.

And as for the state organization, "I would hope that this 'Next Generation' group of the Pennsylvania Ayrshires Breeders Association will continue on...and keep the promotion of Ayrshires going."

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