

Showing Dairy Cattle

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be clued in that commercial and residential interests are crunching in just beyond the southern hill.

They've watched neighbors sell out and the strip malls, condominiums and business areas come in.

They don't need to hear about troubles; they know all about them.

But the Hostetters say they are happy.

It's time for the 75th Farm Show.

Farm Show is one of the highlights of the year for many farmers, especially dairy breeders.

For the members of the Hostetter family in Lebanon County, the Farm Show is an excellent opportunity to display their Dale-Pride Farms registered Holsteins.

It's not that Hostetters ignore the problems facing farming. Far from it. But the Farm Show offers opportunity for change.

Good change. The Farm Show recognizes six breeds of dairy cattle, all of them represented in large number.

The largest representation in any breed of dairy cattle at the Farm Show, and at most dairy shows, is within the Holstein breed.

For the past eight years, the Hostetters have been taking animals to the Farm Show to vie for some of the top titles. In that time they've taken some trophies, and last year one cow was reserve grand in the youth division, but an open class grand champion has remained elusive.

Alan Hostetter, one of the sons in a two son-and-father partnership, said the Hostetter family plans to take six animals to this year's Farm Show — two aged

cow, two 3-year-olds, one dry cow in the 3- to 4-year-old class, and one yearling.

Alan spent the latter part of the week grooming and clipping the intended show animals in preparation for the trip to Harrisburg.

He doesn't have to do much else to prepare these animals, he said. They were halter broken while young and are used to being handled.

"Showing is probably the best advertisement I can do," Hostetter said. "At the Farm Show, a lot of people get to see the animals. I talk to a lot of people. It has led to a lot of tours (at Dale-Pride Farms) and people referring to shows when discussing certain animals."

In addition, another reason for putting up with the extra expense, work and shorthandedness at home is to show off the qualities of their Holsteins in a way that other measures of cattle, such as production numbers, cannot.

According to Hostetter, 30, "Records kept by the USDA, DHIA (Dairy Herd Improvement Association) and the Holstein Association are the show place for the production qualities of your cattle. The Farm Show and other dairy shows are the only way to show the other qualities — the type qualities."

Hostetter, who also happens to be a dairy judge, said those who downplay the importance of breeding dairy animals to improve physical characteristics and concentrate only on milk production values are ultimately breeding inferior animals.

He said he believes there is a direct connection between longevity and good physical characteristics. Furthermore, he said he is a

strong advocate for longevity in dairy cattle.

"I like to see longevity in cows. It takes two years to raise them whether they live to 5 years old or 10 years old," Alan said. "You might as well have them live as long as you can."

Alan isn't the only member of the Hostetter family.

Dale-Pride Farms is a partnership between Alan, older brother Ernest, 40, and their father Dale. Their mother Thelma helps with the milking, takes care of registering calves and other chores around the two farms.

Ernest's sons Brian, 16, Kurt, 11, and his daughter Becky, 19, also work on the farm.

At the Farm Show, the Hostetters' Holsteins will be registered under Dale-Pride, or in combination with one of the members of the family.

Brian Hostetter will be taking over most of the behind-the-scenes duties this year, Alan said. Those duties include milking the cows at the show, making sure they are clean and stay clean, feeding them, brushing them, talking to people . . . sleeping when he can.

Alan will be working in the ring on show days, helping to prepare the animals for the ring. But with the family living about 45 minutes away, and the chores that need to be done, the Hostetters will be a commuter-Farm Show family.

The event is important for the farm business.

They keep a total herd of about 375 head on both farms. Of those, 160 comprise the milking herd.

The Hostetters till 600 acres for forage and some grain feed, but buy the majority of their grain. They make their own corn silage and haylage.

The feed is a total mixed ration

(TMR) concocted with the help of a private feed consultant who tests their feed components regularly.

The November rolling herd average for the farm is 19,700 pounds of milk and 726 pounds of butterfat.

While that may not be impressive as far as overall production, Alan said what really counts is profitability.

According to Alan, his herd averages 66 pounds of milk a day, at 3.1 percent protein and 3.9 percent butterfat and consume 19 pounds of grain.

That calculates to an amazing one to three ratio. The DHIA averages reported monthly in Lancaster Farming are normally one to 2.4, or one to 2.5.

Alan said he feeds regular TMR for his cows that produce up to 70 pounds. He said he top-dresses for cows that produce more than 70 pounds.

The average age of the herd is somewhere from 3½ - to 4-years-old, he said, but the average age fluctuates over the years and can get older or younger as certain groups of cows pass on.

According to Hostetter, the rate of change in average age with a herd bred for longevity is slower which means more stability in production, costs and other factors surrounding running a dairy operation.

Some of Hostetters neighbors, especially some of those who don't register cattle, are benefitting from the breeding program, which stresses type as much as production.

For the past couple of years, Hostetters have been selling some bulls to local dairymen for either cleanup bulls or to serve as the main stud.

"I raise 20 to 25 bull calves and

sell them to local farmers," Alan said. "One man (grade herd) told me he has really noticed an improvement in his herd from using my bulls."

The Hostetter herd is traced back to an Astronaut daughter and an Astronaut granddaughter.

There have been 35 cows within the Hostetter herd which had classified as Excellent since 1966, when the Hostetter family began getting into developing a registered herd. Alan said his brother Ernest started developing the interest while in FFA. Since then they had as many as five Excellent Astronaut daughters bred at one time.

Out of all their Excellents, all but six were homebred.

"People laughed a little when we said we were using Astronaut," he said. "But he gave a lot of strength, a lot of spring of rib and a pretty decent udder."

Some of the Hostetter's better results were from breeding the Astronaut line to Valiant.

One of the Hostetter bulls is now owned in syndicate to Taurus Service. The bull is Val Furious, a VG88. His dam is Hostetterdale Fobes Paclamar, EX-92-3E, 9-04, 365 days, 31,104 milk, 4.7 percent butterfat at 1,461 pounds.

She had six other sons that went to serve as studs overseas, a Valiant daughter which was the top cow in Belgium in 1988, and Excellent 91; and two other Valiant daughters which scored Excellent 90.

They also use Bell, Blackstar and "a lot of our own bulls" in their breeding program.

"Two things I breed for are type and production. At the Farm Show

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