

## Starting Out Alone With Help Of Landlord, Family

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.  
Lancaster Farming Staff

ENDERS (Dauphin Co.) — The 28-degree wind whipped persistently on top of the almost treeless, hill-top dairy farm where Timothy Tobias rose at 5 a.m. to do his milking.

Head down against the wind, the 31-year-old Dauphin Countian made the 200-yard walk to the barn where most of the milking herd waited in their tie-stalls. There was warmer, almost 50-degree air circulating around them.

He was alone, just as he is many mornings, except for a small black and white dog tagging along. He has no wife to help with the bookwork, no children to help out with the chores.

David Trutt, a local part-time hired man, was expected to show up soon, but until this past summer, Tobias was completely alone for the milkings.

He turned the vacuum pump on in the milk house, and it began its rumble-hum. In the barn, the radio played.

This is the life he wants.

But it is not his farm.

Tobias is a renter. One of the many who, starting out in production agriculture without strong family financial support, have sought to find some method of breaking into the business.

In Tobias's case, he said he is lucky. He saved money for more than a decade, he also found a landlord who would take him on and provide a wealth of ready information and guidance.

The cows and heifers are Tobias's. He invested in them, and continues to invest.

The landlords, Roy and Marie Wilbert, own the 113-acre dairy farm. Tobias rents the barn, house, silo, heifer barn and milking equipment.

The tenant and the landlord have formed a strong bond. Perhaps it is unique.

Unlike many who get into dairy farming, Tobias does not come from a farm family. His father is a welder.

It was living in Halifax, near a dairy farm, that spurred Tobias's interest into the dairy industry, he said.

"I grew up next door to Roger Campbell's. I was the neighbor kid who always hung around," Tobias said. He said he grew to really enjoy cows and tending them. Now he not only runs his own

dairy herd, he is in his second term as president of the Dauphin County Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA).

Up until 1986, the Wilberts ran a dairy farm. One of the best in Dauphin County, according to Tobias. And for health reasons, they had herd dispersal.

Timing was about perfect for both the potential landlord and tenant.

In high school, though not a member of 4-H and a member of FFA through vocational-technical school where he studied to work in a plant nursery.

While in school, he worked part time for Campbell doing chores at his dairy. For a while, during school and afterward, he worked at a nursery.

Then for five years he worked for another dairyman, milking, doing chores and helping out with some light fieldwork.

He then became a milk tester, a job he did for another five years. It was through being a milk tester for the Wilberts that the relationship began.

It has since blossomed into the current business arrangement.

In the arrangement, Wilbert does as the field work and hauls the manure. Tobias buys the forages and silages to feed his herd. The rent is paid on a cash basis.

During a recent rental and business arrangement seminar in Lancaster, officials offered advice and guidance about the many items that should be investigated before settling into a business arrangement; to look at the goals and needs of the two parties and the advantages and disadvantages of each plan.

Four types of landlord-tenant arrangements were presented in outline form, although, in practice, the farming world offers as broad a spectrum of business arrangements as there are people.

The Wilbert-Tobias business arrangement is a combination of two of the four types discussed during the seminar; it is a cash-only almost straight landlord-tenant operation, but the tenant owns nothing but the herd and buys all the forages he needs from the landlord.

According to an outline handout provided to farmers who attended the seminar, there are three major advantages to the type of arrangement Tobias is in: it spreads the risk of business between landlord



Tom Tobias feeds some of the young replacement stock housed in a portion of a Virginia-style shed. Tobias rents the property, and like other tenant farmers, must make do with what already exists on the farm. In this case, he said he is very satisfied with the property and landlord.

and tenant; it is a relatively inexpensive way for a young farmer to enter the business; and the tenant farmer is assured of good quality feedstuffs for his dairy animals.

Possible disadvantages to the systems include uncertainty in duration of business, which could result in having a tenant who doesn't have the incentive to maintain rented equipment as well as if it were self-owned; not as much profitability for the tenant, though dependable income for the landlord because of the cash basis; and it requires a closer relationship between partners than another type of relationship might.

The extension agents who presented the information to both potential tenants and landlords, said that the main thing to remember when working out an arrangement is to iron out as much of the responsibilities, both work and financial, before settling on anything.

The agreement should then be presented to an accountant and an attorney.

Tobias and Wilbert used an accountant to figure out rents and

costs.

However, above all else their successful arrangement is probably made possible through one element — mutual respect, understanding and friendship.

For Tobias and Wilbert, the arrangement has been working well.

"I was a milk tester for five years, so I got to know him real well during that time," Tobias said. "I've known him for five years."

The three of them, Roy, Marie and Tom, "sat down and talked it over," after the Wilberts had the herd dispersal.

Tobias's savings amounted to "half of what I needed to get started," when he entered into the arrangement four years ago.

And, being single, it wasn't easy for him.

"When I started, I went around and bought one herd of 19 . . . and small groups from around here.

"The first night I milked four cows. The next night I was up to 11. The following Saturday, I had increased to 34," Tobias said.

Now he milks 49, four of which are owned by someone else, has six dry cows, and about 40 heifers and calves.

All are Holsteins, except one Brown Swiss, which Tobias said is his best heat detector.

The first two years were rough on him. Two years of drought hurt crop production. Milk prices were low and crop prices were high, in addition to being low quality. And on top of that, Tobias didn't have enough cows milking to absorb the changes in income.

"I guess I was kind of fortunate, there were a couple of people around here who had heifers they wanted to keep, and they brought them here to freshen. I got to milk them for a while. That sort of helped me," he said.

And while any dairyman would be foolish to ever say the "rough times" are over, Tobias doesn't have it as rough as he did.

"The first two years, before the high milk prices, were from milk check to milk check," he said.

During that time, his parents would come help him milk, his mother would help with the laundry and cooking. If they couldn't help him out in business with

money, they could offer what they could.

With the past year's higher milk prices, he could afford to hire Trutt for the morning milking and Steve Long, a high school student, to help with the evening milking.

And while some tenant dairymen don't particularly care to have the landlord involved with their business, Tobias said having Roy Wilbert living right there has helped him out many times, such as when having trouble with milking a just-freshened heifer . . .

Roy Wilbert has been his mentor.

Since 1986, Tobias has increased his herd, mostly with home-bred young cows, which are now in first, second, or third lactations.

There is a large age gap between the young ones and the older 13 cows he has remaining of what he had purchased.

The herd is split about evenly between registered and grade animals, and he put it on test Jan. 15 in 1987, "to give the cows a chance to adjust," he said.

Currently, the rolling herd average is about 21,705. His highest producing cow is an old Bossy who made up to 28,000 for him, but has no records at all. This past week she made 117 pounds on test day.

His culling isn't as hard as it may become, but he said he did get rid of one, that while she milked well, "she had a poor disposition. It got so that I was almost afraid to milk her. If she would have hurt me, I'd be alone here," he said.

The heifers and a portion of the milking herd are kept in a Virginia-style barn on a manure pack, at the far end of an exercise yard. Some pasture is available and more is to open up.

However, there doesn't seem to be much potential in expanding the 40-stall building for additional room. As it is with the number of cows he has, he now has to milk in two shifts.

He said he knows he should move them around according to groups, but, "There's a few who like it better out there. If I bring them in here (the barn), they stay standing."

(Turn to Page A35)



Tom Tobias shows off one of his young stock in his 4-year-old dairy herd, Talisman Valor Margot, a former 4-H project heifer he purchased. Tobias is a single tenant dairyman who owns the herd and buys forages and silages from his landlord, and is making it.