

Hershey School Gives Students An Appreciation Of Dairying

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — Teachers often try to respond to the question kids ask, "where does milk come from?"

Sometimes kids answer: the supermarket. But not the kids at the Milton Hershey Schools. They understand where it comes from.

Comprised of some 1,200 students from preschool to grade 12, the privately endowed residential school for needy children recently began integrating some of the major aspects of dairy farming and agriculture into the regular curriculum. Students can volunteer to work at one of the 11 dairy farms on the school premises and experience "hands on" what dairying is all about.

The school, founded in 1909, farmed about 12,000 acres at one

time. The school's founder originally set up the dairy farms for the children, as part of daily "chore time," to milk cows.

School farms

Now, however, the school farms only about 3,200 acres out of 9,000 total acres in the operation. Of the 3,200, only about 2,500 are tillable. The farm grows about 1,000 acres of corn, 250 acres of barley, 250 acres of wheat, 300 acres of soybeans, and 400 acres of alfalfa. (The school was recently recognized by the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council as the outstanding alfalfa producer for the Northeast region at the council's 1991 awards program.) Six thousand remaining acres are maintained by the Hershey Trust Company and leased to other farmers in the area.

The school has a modified TMR



Scott Hoerner, in tractor cab, cuts alfalfa on the Milton Hershey School Farm. The school maintains about 400 acres of alfalfa, and was recently recognized as outstanding alfalfa producer by the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council.

program on one herd. They also operate their own feed mill and make up their own rations, working with the University of Pennsylvania. The school also uses forage analysis to more accurately measure and modify the feed.

Each farm is maintained by a full-time herdsman. There are a total of 12 herdsmen and two supervisors, along with 11-12 substitutes to rotate the work schedule.

Eleven dairy herds of graded Holstein are broken into units as small as 36 per farm to as many as 100 head (housed in a freestall barn and a double-6 milking parlor). Breeding is all AI. The farm is on Pennsylvania DHIA owner/sampler, with a rolling herd average of approximately 17,000 pounds.

Students volunteer

Students can volunteer to work on the dairy farms, but are not required to. Also, students can sign up to work on the vegetable and fruit farms at the school.

All this is to allow the students to experience what farming is really all about.

"Most of our students are inner-city students," said Richard C. Hann, director of agribusiness at the school. "They come from the inner city. They have no idea what happens out in the nature area. They don't know that potatoes don't grow on trees. It's amazing. It's that kind of thing we want them to become more aware of — more of the environmental type things in nature. I think it has tremendous potential."

The students are made up of three groups: junior (pre-kindergarten through 4th grade); intermediate (5th through 8th grade); and senior (9th through 12th grade). Only the senior group can live on the dairy farms.

Intent of program

Hann said that the intent of the program "was not to necessarily make agriculture students out of them," he said. "It was more or less a 'work ethic' type of situation, giving them a chance to be part of something. And some of the students that have gone through the program have felt that it meant a lot of things to them."

The students working together can contribute their experiences and knowledge to furthering the program, according to the director. The program works because the students can volunteer and because of the resources available to them. "We are so many generations



Mark McCorkel, dairy herdsman, demonstrates the use of paper bedding at one of the farm locations at the Milton Hershey School Farms.



Dairy herdsmen at the farm inspect the loading of a silo. Here, Brian Hoerner, farmer/herdsman substitute, watches the load off the truck into the conveyor.

removed from agriculture," said Norman Miller, farm manager at the school. Miller noted that only 2 or 3 percent of the entire U.S. population is directly involved in agriculture.

"We're assuming that these kids know this, about where their food comes from on the food/fibre

chain," he said. "But our assumptions are wrong — they don't know."

Chain event

Miller said it is up to the instructors at the school to "reinstate that

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Norman Miller, farm manager, pauses to inspect a strawberry field at the Milton Hershey School Farms.



Bill McNitt, dairy herdsman, loads a bale of hay for shredding and silo storage at the Milton Hershey School Farms.