

Young Couple Manages Dairy Farm With Help Of Family

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QUARRYVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — In a southwest corner of Lancaster County is a pocket of farmland that has held on to time.

The Amish dairymen in the area have helped to keep it rural and agricultural.

But the Amish aren't the only ones. Some of the "English" are sticking it out, too.

Together, they have thwarted efforts by real estate speculators to turn their area into so many soulless strip malls sitting among rows of cookie-cutter frame houses, generic yards and mail-order landscaping.

Instead, the woodlots in the low rolling farmland are devoid of recently built houses. The woods are sanctuaries to small populations of wildlife, such as whitetail deer that the farmers hunt and enjoy.

(Such as a huge huck taken about four years ago which carried a set of antlers a peach basket would not cover.)

The area does not suffer from a constant roaring of relentless traffic. The residents of this area near Quarryville listen to pheasants cackle occasionally, or the bold, screaming cry of a red-tailed hawk.

And, it is not an area where farmers frequently get jolted awake in the middle of the night at the crash of a car smashing through a fence into a pasture.

Those kind of experiences create an emotional mixture of worry and disgust.

Instead, sleep is more often disturbed here by the bellowing of a cow giving birth, or a baby crying to be fed or held.

One young couple on their way to making a success with a dairy cattle herd in this pocket of farming country said they don't intend to move away, as long as conditions continue to be conducive to agriculture.

Mark and Kris Welk have been operating Welk-Shade Farm for the past four years. They have a 2-year-old daughter, Nicole.

Mark, 26, made news recently when he was presented with the title of "Outstanding Young Farmer, Under 30."

According to him, it was a surprise honor that is uncomfortable to talk about, because he said he is reluctant to show pride.

However, he did receive recog-

niton from his peers for doing a great job in agriculture.

"You have to be dedicated," he said. "I'm fortunate to have had a good herd built up before we moved here, and that means a lot, but I guess it means doing the best with what you got."

The young Welk couple does do a lot with what they have.

They milk 70 registered Holsteins twice a day on a pipeline system, have 140 acres on the farm, 110 acres of which are tillable, and they rent an additional 80 acres. They grow predominately corn and alfalfa, and they always double crop with rye and barley.

The barn is old. The 64 tie stalls are too short at 57 inches. Manure is hauled daily, although Mark is working on getting work done for a storage system through the Chesapeake Bay Program.

And efforts are being made to remodel the barn for increased cow comfort.

Their rolling herd average is more than 20,000 pounds of milk and increasing. In fact, since switching to a total mixed ration, their milk production has increased 3,000 pounds and the fat and protein have each gone up about hundred pounds.

Their herd's somatic cell count has been staying around 100,000, which is premium range. They've got a bull calf headed for an artificial insemination stud, and one they're attempting to prove by themselves.

But they've had help.

Mark is the son of Paul and Bev Welk from Peach Bottom, where Mark worked for 15 years before moving to farm of Kris's parents, Fred (deceased) and Nancy Espenshade, four years ago.

The Espenshade farm became available to the couple through the tragedy of Fred's death and with Nancy's continued help.

On Mark's side, his father Paul has supported them with savvy of the business and help around the farm. He also works at a feed mill and picks up forage samples from Mark to have them tested.

Mark's brother Matthew, 17, also helps out, driving from their Peach Bottom farm to milk and help fill the silos.

"If it wouldn't be for them, we wouldn't be farming," Mark said, in acknowledgement of the support of both families.

"Otherwise you'd have to be a millionaire to get into dairy farm-



This is one of Mark and Kris Welk's prides, Welk-Shade Logic Kit-Red, a 1991 reserve All-American, she was one year in December.



A portrait of a young dairy family: Mark Welk holds the show halter of Fran-Lou Clarine, a 7-year-old Excellent cow with strong legs and frame, while accompanied by wife Kris, daughter Nicole, and Buddy, a brown Labrador Retriever.

ing. And if you were already a millionaire, why would you be a dairy farmer?" he said, laughing at the irony.

However, Mark loves to farm. And he loves to take care of his cattle.

"I don't feel I'm so much better," he said reflecting on the award. "I'm just fortunate to have

had a real good teacher in my dad," Mark said. "He taught me to appreciate good cows."

Mark's herd is outstanding in that it contains seven Excellent cows and a number of Very Goods. His BAA is more than 106.

Although he buys from time to time, he traces his high index back to a calf he bought when he was 12 years old. She was an Arlinda Jet Stream daughter — VG 82, 180,000 pounds of milk in her lifetime, Dam of Merit winner — and she gave him five natural daughters, four of which were classified as Very Goods.

Those daughters continued providing good daughters and now, four generations later, he is sending a Vanguard calf, a great, great, granddaughter to his Arlinda cow, back to the auction where he made his first purchase — the Eastern

Shore Showcase Calf Sale.

"I originally bought the Jetstream there and I thought it would be kind of neat to send one back after four generations," he said.

The couple's goal is "to manage the herd for milk and breed for type," Mark said. "We want to get into merchandising. We want it to be a breeding herd."

And it is not only his family that has helped in the couple's efforts to make a good life for themselves and their family. The Young Farmers organization figures into the equation, they said.

The Young Farmer organization is statewide and is important to the Welks because it provides valuable information, but also something else. It provides an opportunity for young farmers to meet young farmers — there aren't many of them left.

Warren 4-H Forage Meeting Scheduled

WARREN (Warren Co.) — All Warren County 4-H members with dairy, horse, or livestock projects are invited to attend a March 2 forage meeting at the county 4-H center.

The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. and is to feature extension agents from Crawford, Erie and Warren

counties discussing hay quality, cutting management and the economics of feeding hay.

Participants are also to learn about protein, fiber and energy contents in various types of hay.

They will also have an opportunity to place hay samples, according to a forage analysis.



Welk-Shade Astro Jet Set-ET is a 2-year-old bull that Mark and Kris Welk are currently attempting to prove. He comes from a strong type and production line the young couple has bred for.