

## Bloodlines Priority At Esbern Dairy

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**MANSFIELD (Tioga Co.)** —

Quality show cows may not have been the original goal of Harold Courtney who oversees the breeding of registered Holsteins at Esbern Dairy. Nevertheless, his efforts are producing just that.

Esbern Mark Corinne Connie (Connie for short), a 4-year-old sired by Walkway Chief Mark, was the first animal from the farm to enter competitions and has done well in every one.

Participating this year in numerous shows, both county and state-wide, the cow has brought home several senior and grand champion awards, as well as being named best udder.

Although excellent bloodlines have played a large part in Connie's success, she certainly could not have been named a champion without other members of the Courtney family helping her.

Leading her at the shows has been Olivia Courtney, 14, the daughter of Harold and Sherry and the third generation to take an active part in farm life at Esbern Dairy, the home of Harold's parents Esther and Bernard Courtney.

Even Olivia's mom Sherry, an elementary school teacher in the Troy School District, has taken part as being the Holstein's fitter, although Olivia does trim Connie's head.

Sherry's other important role in Connie's success is being a "show mom." Duties include taking daughter Olivia and the bovine to shows, making sure they are prepared to enter the ring, and rooting for them from the sidelines.

First to spot Connie's qualities was local farmer and friend of the Courtneys, Leroy Plance.

Since the Courtneys were not experienced with showing cattle, Plance offered to take her to the district Holstein championship show in 1988. There Connie placed first in the senior class category.

Inspired by the cow's initial success, Olivia decided to try her hand at showing. She joined the Pickadilly 4-H and began showing Connie in 1991. At the Tioga County Fair that year, Olivia and Connie made a great team, with the bovine being named grand champion and best udder in the open show.

This year Olivia stood proudly beside her cow as Connie earned a first in her class, senior champion, grand champion and best udder at the 4-H show and a second in her class at the open show at the Tioga County Fair.

Additionally, her 1992 achievements include a first in her class, senior champion, grand champion and best udder at the 4-H District Show; a first in her class, senior champion, grand champion, best udder and best owned and bred at the district championship Holstein show; a first in the junior class and third in the adult class at the Black and White State Championship show; and a third in her class at the 4-H state show.

Olivia has plans to enter Connie in the Junior All-Pennsylvania Show in the near future and in many shows next year.

If Connie is just the beginning of championship cows to come out of Esbern Dairy, then Olivia's sister Charity and brother Hal are bound to see some blue ribbons of their own in the future.

This year, Charity, 11, gained enough success to reach state-

level competition. Hal, 8, also participated in his first show this year and is looking forward to more.

In addition to showing cattle, the children help feed calves on their grandparents' farm, plus do other incidental jobs that are part of any farming operation.

Bernard and Esther established Esbern Dairy in 1957. Over the years their business has grown to 500 head on a total of five farms in the Mansfield area.

Farmer in the Dell, a popular local restaurant/dairy store which houses a processing plant for jug milk, is also part of Courtneys' business.

The barn on the home farm measures 60-feet by 240-feet, and houses 72 stanchions. There they milk 180 head, rotating the herd in three groups. At Farmer in the Dell, they normally milk 60 head using a four-stall parlor.

The most recent acquisition was a farm neighboring the home farm. The Courtneys gutted the barn and reorganized the stalls to house 125 heifers in the winter.

Inside the barn, gates are strategically placed to allow the herd to move about freely in one section, while another is being cleaned. An automatic feeder is another convenience installed.

For his milkers, Harold prefers to feed "a combination of good hay, grain and corn silage" in a total mix ration. The Courtneys plant 50 acres of oats, 250 acres of corn, and put in approximately 60,000 bales of hay each year. Soybeans are purchased for the grain mixture.

Haylage is stored in a 16-foot by 60-foot silo.

Corn silage is stored in four silos ranging in sizes from 24 feet by 70 feet, 20 feet by 70 feet, and 24 feet by 60 feet.

In rating his soil, Harold said, "We have river flats that we rent, and some average Tioga County fields. Down through this valley right here (at Esbern Dairy) we have pretty good soil.

"We dry treat every cow when she dries off," said Harold, in regards to important factors in keeping a healthy herd. Plus, the herd is checked weekly by a veterinarian so health problems do not have a chance to advance.

Expenses are minimized in other areas, however, as the Courtneys do all their own repair work on equipment or buildings and overhaul their tractors themselves. They have even built the newer buildings on their property.

Although Harold doesn't foresee the farm economy improving much in the next few years, he remains optimistic about Esbern Dairy's position, especially because of his breeding practices.

Their main goals for the future, according to Sherry, is to try to increase the profit, cut losses and improve the bloodline. She said, "The one basic thing we've tried very hard to do is keep the bloodline improving. We've done all our own breeding and we have never bought cows away from the farm. They are all home-bred."

"We use the top bulls from a lot of different studs," said Harold, explaining his use of the Type Proof Index (TPI).

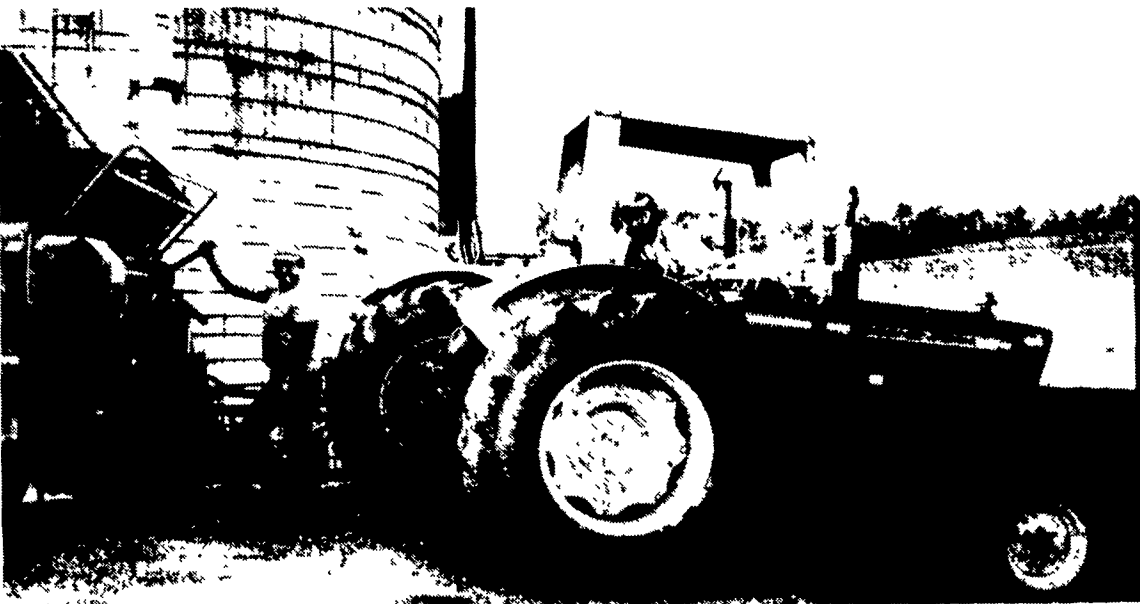
In addition to using bulls from the Esbern Dairy herd, Sherry explained that her husband selects bulls from TPI for their strong points which he matches to Esbern dams with similar weak points.

With Connie, at least, the practice has paid off. And the Court-

(Turn to Page A21)



Three generations of Courtneys stand next to their farm sign. From the left front are Hal and Charity with Morris the cat. In the back, from the left, are Esther, Bernard, Sherry, Olivia and Harold.



Bernard Courtney is at the wheel of the tractor, while his son Harold has his hand on a control lever to unload corn silage at one of the Courtneys five farms.



In addition to making milk, the Courtneys bottle and market it also through their combination dairy store and restaurant, Farmer in the Dell.



Olivia Courtney shows her multiple champion 4-year-old Holstein named Connie.