



The Frank Miller family dairy farm is the home of the highest average protein production in the state and also has been awarded the top 1992 Pen-



sylvania DHIA management award for the Holstein breed.

DHIA Names Miller Farm

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(not through DHIA) have been averaging around 150,000 or less, according to the dairy to which they sell milk.

And while the recognition is reason for smiles, Frank said it is more important to him that the Millers stay a family and that they keep the land in farming.

The herd management award program acknowledges those whose management skills have resulted in good and consistent increases in production and enviable records for reproductive management and somatic cell control.

The purpose of the award is to reward those dairyman who consistently practice overall good management, not necessarily those who shine with just rolling herd average.

Through a point-system formula — which does weigh heavily the past year's milk and milk component production, and also includes management aspects — operators with herds on test with Pa.DHIA are judged for management improvements.

This is the second year for the herd management awards program, the brainchild of Pa.DHIA management.

Last year, Susquehanna County dairyman D. Byron Hunsinger and family were recognized for having the most improved Holstein herd.

But while Hunsinger acknowledged changing a lot of small things around the farm which was reflected in a large increase in production, the Miller family (Frank especially) maintains that they really didn't expect the recognition because they had been continuing to farm as they had been — with constant care and attention to details, diligent work, use of a nutritionist, insistence on cow comfort and care, and family cooperation.

The only real changes were in feed quality — last year produced some high quality alfalfa hay for their herd — and the sense that the herd is maturing genetically.

"We don't really pay attention to the herd averages," Frank said. "But you shouldn't write this about me. If it weren't for Brian and (Brian's wife) Bonnie, I probably wouldn't be doing this (milking cows)."

After high school, Brian, 35, had left the farm for 2½ years to work heavy construction, only to return home where he could work hard for results, not just put in hours for pay, he said.

Frank explained that he was considering selling the cows, but changed his mind when Brian expressed interest in dairying. "I

told him his home is always here," Frank said.

Surrounded by large tracts of "investor-owned" farms — which in reality are residential developments waiting to happen — the Miller farm sits on the edge of a plateau which quickly drops to the impressive lower Delaware River.

From the farm, the area still retains its rural appearance. The community economy in nearby Martin's Creek is a strange mix of tourism business and bedroom residents.

The tourism businesses cater to the fisherman who swell the banks and whose boats cruise the river from late spring to early summer in pursuit of the anadromous shad on its spawning run.

The bedroom community is largely peopled by urban sprawl spilled over from New Jersey.

Much of the open farm land is owned by well-to-do New Jersey and Pennsylvania real estate investors who either rent the land or allow farmers to work it for next to nothing in order to keep down taxes on their investment (agriculture status gives it a tax break).

However, Brian said they are really "house farms" waiting for the economic weather to improve before a new crop is planted.

It is significant that most of the building lots on the other previous or retiring farmland fetch prices of \$40,000 to \$50,000 or more — without improvements.

It is significant because transferring a farm from one generation to the next is almost impossible with the state's built-in incentives to disperse the wealth of an individual, rather than allow heirs to have easier footing because of the dedication and hard work of their previous generations.

Frank Miller isn't about to let that happen, he said sternly. His intention is to give the farm — barn, cattle and field — to Brian and Bonnie so they can continue to keep the farm as a farm and in the family and not end up as an investment by someone with a lucrative city business and no good place to put extra money.

It's easy to see Frank and wife Arlene are proud of their family and sons and daughters. All of them. It's also easy to see how good they feel with the working relationship that has occurred.

For many farm families, apparent strong wills and lack of communications undermine what otherwise seems should be a strong cooperative effort.

That's not true with the Frank Miller Jr. family operation. Everybody has their jobs. No one, Frank said, tells anybody else how to do

their job.

But then, he said he doesn't see the need for that kind of bickering — everyone is in it together.

Brian takes care of feeding and reproduction. Frank takes care of crops. Arlene takes care of the books. Bonnie takes care of the calves. Brian and Frank do the milking. No outside help milks.

Of course there is temporary crossover of duties when hay needs to be made, corn picked, etc. But that isn't often.

Frank Sr. bought the 160-acre farm in 1928 among other farms owned by kin. They live on Miller Road. He had a variety farm.

Giving most of the credit of his love of cows to his FFA experience (he was state vice president in 1954), Frank Jr. said. "I liked cows and we had calves I showed in FFA."

After graduating high school (in 1954), Frank Jr. built an extension on the barn taking it to 51 comfort stalls. The herd increased from 18 animals eventually to the current number.

The only major change was to add a vacuum pipeline after Brian graduated high school in 1975.

They've been on test for 10 years to help with some manage-

Mase Leads Mixed Breed Category

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — Gary Mase, of Lebanon, didn't pick up his Pa.DHIA herd management award as of last week — he wasn't able to attend the county annual banquet and his tester, who has the awards, just delivered a baby and won't be back on the job for a couple weeks.

He said, no matter, it was pleasant news to find out from friends who were able to attend the banquet.

The recognition is strange, he said, because it really reflects a turnaround from a big drop in production last year.

Hurt by bad weather and an economy less receptive to his marketing of Brown Swiss genetics, he didn't use his mixed breed herd-for-embryo transfer donors. There was a period when they stood dry — that is his mixed breed's main function, he said, carrying Brown Swiss embryos and making milk.

Mase, profiled in Lancaster Farming's May 12, 1990 issue, realizes the backbone of his production is the same for any dairy farmer — making milk.

Mase is a contract-producer for Wenger's Dairy in Lebanon. At the time of the article, he had 35



Brian Miller drives a tractor, pulling a load of ear corn.

ment decisions. However, Frank said he is not as production oriented in his culling decisions as some people might be.

When he bought the majority of his original cows, the owner told him that if he wants to build a good herd, you have to do with good animals. They haven't culled for milk production or reproduction reasons if they have a "good" cow. A good cow to them has produced a

lot of milk, has strong type and structure, but may be lacking something else which can be changed through breeding.

So they have been keeping what others may have sent to market and breeding for offspring which fulfill the potential locked inside the older cows.

That is the secret Frank said he was told in order to build a strong herd.



Gary Mase received the top management award from Pennsylvania DHIA in the mixed breed category.

Brown Swiss milking cows and another smaller herd of mixed breed, including some Holstein cows. He said he averaged about 70 pounds of milk a day, per cow, in the tank.

The mixed herd included 15 Holsteins and about six crossbreeds.

He currently has 10 Excellent cows in the Brown Swiss herd. But he doesn't cull the same way others might in a strict milk production operation.

His marketing strategy includes selling stock in a breed for which

he has much admiration. He said that, while a Brown Swiss may not perform head-to-head with other 2- and 3-year-old Holsteins right now, they will produce comparatively as 4-year-olds and through the later lactations. Furthermore, their milk component percentage is almost a point above Holsteins on average.

He also said that, because of the breeds' sturdy, large frame and much recognized strength in feet and legs, they live longer and can last through more lactations.

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