

Dedication Marks Coolidge Dairy Of Distinction

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WELLSBORO (Tioga Co.)** —

Years of planning and hard work — for Erick and Dixie Coolidge, the effort proved satisfying when they received the Dairy of Distinction Award in June 1992.

"Dad wanted it years ago, and I felt we needed to have a track record showing that we didn't do it just for the reward, if we were to ever apply," said Erick, who with his wife, operates a 160-plus milking herd of registered and grade Holsteins.

Unfortunately, Erick's father did not get to see Le-Ma-Re win the award — he passed away in 1988. To Erick and Dixie, the goal was reached in his memory.

The road to success was certainly one full of rocks and potholes, as the Coolidges experienced a number of setbacks throughout their farming history. The year 1983 was probably their most difficult year. That June, their milk market went bankrupt. Then, Erick's dad suffered three heart attacks in three consecutive months. The final blow of the year came when their barn was destroyed by fire in November. Their herd was out to pasture at the time and the only livestock loss was one calf.

A neighbor lent them the use of a barn at no charge while they were building a new one, which they moved into a year later.

The farm has seen changes over the years in other ways, too. "We are a Pennsylvania Century Farm," said Erick. Although the paperwork hasn't been completed to make them "official," the Coolidges have researched their farm back as far as the mid-1800s.

"My grandfather retired in the late 1960s and I entered into partnership with my father in the 1970s. The acreage has increased over the years from 350 since my grandfather's retirement to its present 850."

There are actually two farms the Coolidges maintain — Le-Ma-Re where they reside and the other 'Roadside Dairy,' what they call the original homestead, next door.

Erick credits his wife as being the driving force that keeps their Le-Ma-Re Farm looking good. In fact, Erick claims they would not have received the Dairy of Distinction Award "were it not for the commitment and hard work primarily Dixie does for the outside appearance of the farm and her willingness to tolerate us when we don't always park the equipment where we should."

The award sign, displayed in



Surrounded by empty stalls, Erick Coolidge awaits the return of his herd from pasture for their noon feeding in the 100-head, nine-year-old barn.

their yard, has been an inspiration to the Coolidges' employees as well. Erick said, "The guys have taken a new sense of pride in not only the work they do, but the appearance of the farm. They feel a part of what it's all about."

While Le-Ma-Re has always been an attractive farm along Route 287 south of Wellsboro, the Coolidges' beautification efforts increased in 1991 as they prepared to host the first Farm-City Day in Tioga County. Even gray skies interspersing drizzle throughout the day did not deter the turnout of 2,000 people, marking the event a sound success. The Coolidges' employees were anxious to host Farm-City Day then, and apparently their enthusiasm hasn't changed as Erick said with a laugh, "Rodney (Cleveland) even wanted to do it again!"

It is this kind of dedication that endears his employees to Erick. "They are the key reasons why Dixie and I have what we have since my father's passing," said Erick of Ron Jones of Roseville and Rodney Cleveland of Wellsboro. "They're very much a part of not only the working part of it, but also the decision making. They have to understand why we do what we are doing." Expanding that involvement, Erick established an incentive program allowing his employees to be awarded whenever the farm gains through their efforts.

The success the Coolidges have experienced with their hired hands is evident in their herd management program. Two of their grade Holsteins are featured in identifying herd books. Le-Ma-Re Darrel #4 is in the Tri-State Breeders catalog and #56 Le-Ma-Re Joy is in Eastern AI Federated Genetics.

The Coolidges also have two part-timers: Reid Webster, a senior citizen, and Mike Confair, a high school student.

Additional help comes from the Coolidges' son Derick, 10, who is responsible for the outside care and some of the calves.

Dixie helps, too. Not only does she take care of their three children, including daughters, Shalene, 15, and Chelsie, 8, she also keeps their home in order, as well as does farm chores. Erick is quick to credit his wife. "She's very good with the calves," he said, "overseeing their feeding and medical care, but she also participates wherever she is needed, from working the ground to raking



Dixie opted for a paint-roller and painting the bathroom when asked to pose with the Dairy of Distinction sign. Erick stood next to the sign prominently displayed in a flower bed adorned with silk flowers arranged by Dixie.



Erick prepares to haul manure as he boards his tractor at Le-Ma-Re.

hay and milking."

A firm believer in letting the experts be their guide, the Coolidges use an Agway feed program right from day one with newborn calves.

"It creates an overall balance in the animal and we are definitely seeing positive results," said Erick.

They grow their own crops of corn, alfalfa, mixed hay, and oats. Forage samples are then tested to determine the amount of pellets added to provide a complete, balanced diet.

"Because of the diet they have been receiving since birth, we now have heifers entering the herd at above herd average."

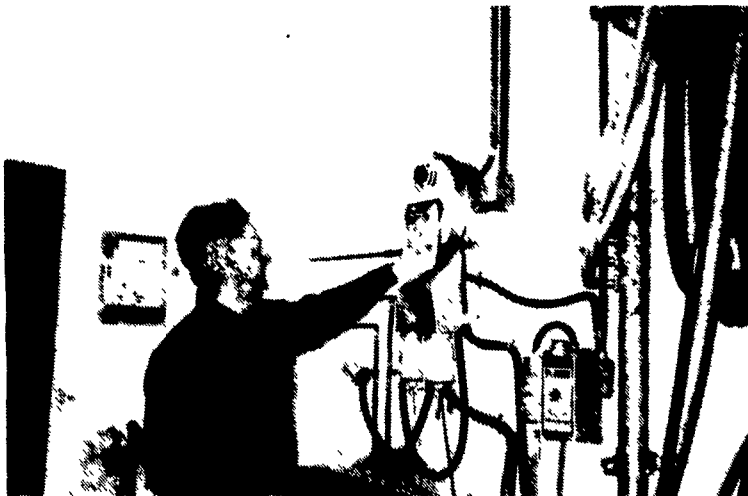
Their most recent DHIA records show a rolling herd average 17,900 pounds of milk, with 645 in fat and 565 in protein.

Involvement in co-ops has played a large part in Erick's and Dixie's

farming practices. "In the mid-80s," said Erick, "we were fortunate to be elected as Chair Couple in the PAFC (Pennsylvania Association of Farm Co-ops, now the Pennsylvania Council of Co-ops). We were also involved with Dairy's Young Couples Program and the National Milk Young Couples Program." In 1987, they were nominated to represent the Mansfield chapter of Jaycees and were named Pennsylvania's Young Farm Couple on the national level at the convention in Orlando, Fla. in 1987.

In praise of these programs, Erick said, "Each was an enriching opportunity and has given us a chance to experience different types of (farm) operations and different viewpoints (on farming). It's an educational aspect. You come away with a broader sense of what's going on around you.

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Erick's hectic schedule does not deter his employees in finding ways to communicate with him. In the milkinghouse, Erick finds a note left by Ron Jones.



Erick proudly stands next to #56 Le-Ma-Re Joy, a Holstein grade cow featured in the Eastern AI Federated Genetics catalog.