

Stahls Lead Family Dairy Near Somerset

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SOMERSET (Somerset Co.)—
If it's a fine day and you happen to visit George and Audrey Stahl at their Somerset location, you may not want to leave the serene Dairy of Distinction farm setting. It's scenic, restful, and beautiful.

It's where they raised their five, now-adult children, of whom two are sons (full-fledged farmers), and three are daughters who certainly enjoy coming home. Said Stahl "Kathy (Shriner, Moundsville, W.Va.) will be in the barn 10 minutes after she gets here."

With Tim and David, the father and son trio does most the field and crop work on the 400-acre, 1782 bicentennial farm that George (sixth generation there) and Audrey purchased in 1970 from his folks. They switched houses in the deal.

So milking the 70-head Holstein herd twice daily often finds Audrey digging in with everybody else. Daughter Sandra Popernack, who lives nearby with her family, comes around regularly to help. The Stahl dairy figures rank

high in the DHIA county reports that are regularly released. Stahl said that two of his cows, for the first time in 1992, were classified Excellent.

Much has changed over the years. Stahl said that when they bought the farm, butterfat produced was 450 pounds. In 1975, milk production was 16,000 pounds and butterfat was 630. Last year, 1992, the Stahl herd averaged more than 24,000 pounds of milk and 950 pounds of butterfat, Stahl said.

He credits improved feed quality with the higher herd productivity. Probably the biggest factor in achieving that improvement was investing in a big Harvestore silo for haylage.

"Prior to that we tried to bale Truth to tell, each person is too busy to sit around talking, so it isn't surprising when Stahl says those subjects are often the milking-time topics, discussed as they work together.

"We don't make snap decisions," he said, adding that individual opinions differ and they have disagreements, but they com-

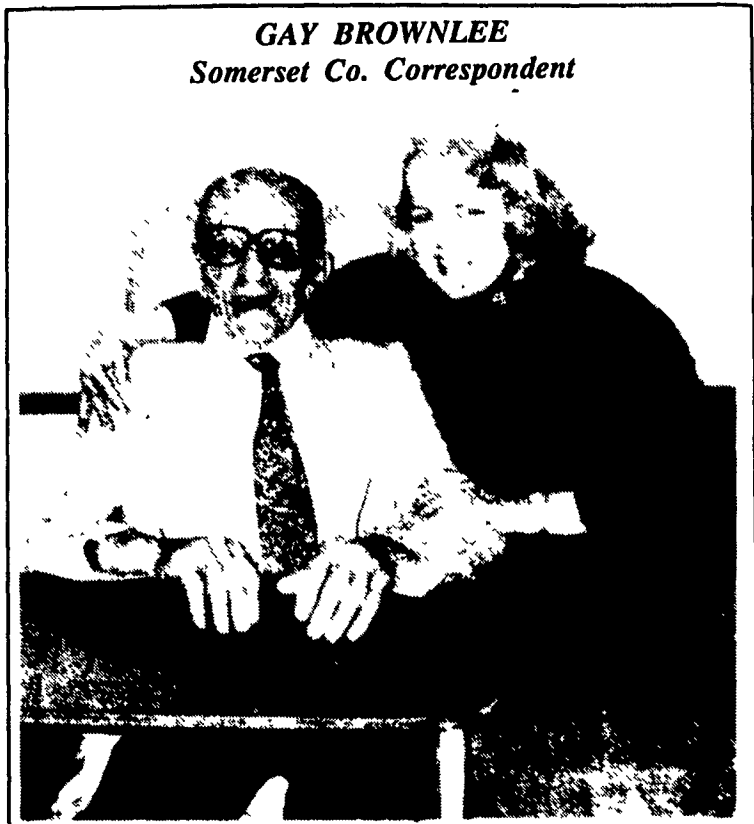
promise. Stahl believes there are three critical areas of expertise for today's farmer. He must know how to manage his herd, his crops, and his finances. "For any successful farmer, you probably should be on top of these," he said.

"We really need more money for what we do," said Stahl. "I would like to see all farm organizations join in unison and to see direction. They are the voice of the farmer and need good leadership. Most farmers don't have the time to actively campaign and, until there is unison, we won't get far.

"The majority of farmers are doing a fine job," Stahl said. "We are stewards of the soil, but everybody falls short once in awhile."

Occasionally, a traveler on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which flanks a portion of the Stahl farm, will arrive for a visit, since the house and barn are readily visible from the busy, multilane highway.

One such person was the mother of an animal rights activist from another state. Through his hospitable, yet honest attitude, Stahl had an opportunity to explain and



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Gay Brownlee with her father, Walter Killus.

Gay Brownlee says that life is sweet when you make somebody happy and that's exactly what she was able to do when the Reader's Digest recently bought her contribution for their "Heroes For Today" feature in the June 1993 issue.

The hero was a local drugstore owner who ceremoniously burned all the tobacco products (\$2,000 worth) in his store and his license to sell them, vowing to

sell no tobacco products.

The writer was her good friend, Madolin Edwards, whose name accompanied the story first published by the local daily newspaper some 15 months ago (they say good things come to those who wait).

Children also sweeten life. So with a new grandson in the family circle to join his one 10-year-old (almost) male cousin as her only grandchildren, Brownlee isn't complaining.



With their 107-year-old gracious farmhouse behind them, George and Audrey Stahl of Somerset stand on the front walk with their dog, Teddy.



George and Audrey Stahl of Somerset stand beside their Dairy of Distinction sign.

demonstrate how well his cows are cared for. She was far better informed when she left than when she came. Plus she had gained accurate on-site facts to later relay to the daughter, who had never visited any facility against which she was demonstrating in behalf of the animals she wanted to save.

"The story isn't being told about agriculture," Stahl said. He believes there must be a better way to inform the public about where their food comes from.

Audrey tends the beautiful lawn herself that surrounds the gracious 107-year-old farmhouse. On the other side of the rural roadway, she has a big vegetable garden from which she fills several freezers and canning jars during the late summer harvest.

A number of years ago, the Stahls cheerfully hosted the "Some-everything," Stahl said, "and could not get it dry enough. Now we seem to have a much better quality feed."

Having high-moisture corn has also improved feed quality, he said, and they started using a nutritionist, Donnie Witt.

Stahl said the protein percentage in their milk stays constant in the

20 to 22 range. He said the biggest factors in the DHIA regarding the cows that are being milked are nutrition and breeding.

Their forage samples are tested at the Bigertone Lab.

"If they (cows) are standing dry too long, it's going to hurt in DHIA," he said. "Cows are just like we are when the nutritionist comes and they don't feel good."

Stahl said he looks at the DHIA figures to see where the operation is going.

It's an asset that David attended Penn State, and Tim, diesel mechanic school. Their varied knowledge, combined with Stahl's experience, have built a good business base.

Tim and his wife have a daughter but David is unmarried. Their youngest sister, Vicki, a former Somerset County dairy princess and student at Waynesburg College, has a summer job and currently lives at home.

Stahl and Audrey vividly recall an outbreak of mastitis some years ago that threatened extinction of their entire dairy herd. But somehow that didn't happen. They had six cows to abort within two days.

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Tim Stahl stands ready to enter the cab of the big John Deere tractor. He is part of the Stahl family dairy farming operation near Somerset.