

Focuses On Merchandising

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Brook Sally Cleitus and her family members. Dr. Larry Kennel of Cornerstone Genetics comes to the farm twice a week to do the flushing.

The previous Sally, a Ned-Boy, died last November. She peaked at 160 pounds as a 3-year-old. Eight of her daughters are milking; all have exceptional records. She is the dam of Sonja and Tidy-Brook Sally Cleitus, who has been the focal point of their flushing program for the past two years.

She is the top cow of the Holstein breed for milk in the nation and seventh in the breed for protein.

Marketing Program

Alan has exported 31 of Sally Cleitus's eggs to Europe, and seven of her bull calves are in AI. He has contracts for six more bulls domestically, and one to Japan.

"It's always been my goal to put a bull in AI," Alan said. He has sent 12, and has 23 more contracts.

Alan started his marketing program three years ago, using the international issue of "Holstein World" to obtain names and addresses of embryo buyers and bull studs. He sent pedigrees to several, then followed up with phone calls.

"It's like a full-time job," Alan said of the work involved with marketing embryos. "It takes up most of the evenings."

"He's constantly on the phone," Kendra added.

When Alan is putting a calf on a sale, he calls contacts who have shown interest in the family.

When visitors arrive at Tidy-Brook — a frequent occurrence — someone has to show them around, even if it's milking time or there is hay drying in the fields.

Some visitors are buyers, some are just curious, Alan said, but all are treated as potential buyers. They are given pictures, production updates, and pedigrees. In anticipation of visitors, Alan and Mark keep the cows clipped and the area scraped — and clean.

Alan said one of his biggest hassles of merchandising is obtaining, on short notice, semen that qualifies for sending embryos overseas.

He will refuse a contract if he thinks the mating won't work.

"Usually they'll work with you," he said.

Management Changes

Because of strict rules concerning the exporting of embryos, Alan and Mark have made some changes in farm management.

They always use a fresh, sterile needle for each cow, and calves get colostrum only from leukosis-clean cows. When a top calf is born, it is not permitted to nurse its mother.

Sally is dry now, but when she is milking she is kept in a separate box stall and fed individually. "It's an extreme amount of extra work," Alan said.

Tidy-Brook's RHA is 19,300 pounds of milk. "That has suffered severely from flushing," Alan said. "We ignore it to concentrate on getting the maximum bottom line."

All of his cows, except two, are used to incubate embryos. Alan explained that a calf out of an Excellent cow might be worth about \$500; a calf out of the Sally family is worth much more. If a cull cow happens to come in heat before she's shipped, she will remain in the herd to carry an embryo.

Division of Labor

Alan makes all the decisions on the cows and Mark is responsible for the field work.

Mark and Kendra milk in the morning; Mark and employee Joel Mills, 17, milk in the afternoon. Alan feeds the cows and Ashley and Whitney feed the calves.

They milk 80 cows in a double-5 herringbone parlor with 10 units. It takes them an hour and a half.

Kendra, 29, was not raised on a farm. "She's adjusted well; she does a good job," her father-in-law said.

Kendra does the farm's financial accounts on the computer. Alan keeps the books on the cows, doing the registrations and contracts, and keeping abreast of the changes in the current popularity of bulls.

Joel, a student at Chambersburg Area Senior High School, lived in the other half of the farmhouse as a child and liked to watch the farming operation.

"We sent him to feed calves," Alan said, "and now we trust him with anything with the cows."

Mark's wife Lyndell is no long-

er actively involved with the farming operation.

Getting Started

When Alan first wanted to flush, Mark was not enthusiastic, but he went along with it. He reluctantly agreed the second time.

Mark explained that he was hesitant because of the cost involved and because, "I'm just the old school."

Now he says, "Financially, it's been good to us."

At first, Alan sold a lot of embryos by sending photos and making phone calls to potential buyers. Soon, people started coming to the farm. "It came too easy to start with," Alan said.

Alan's advice for someone wanting to get into merchandising is straightforward: "Don't call people unless you have something they might be interested in. Watch the sales, see what the bull studs are taking in. What is creating val-

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Bonnie Brechbill lives on a 105-acre dairy farm in Edenville with her husband and 9-year-old daughter. Originally from Long Island, N.Y., she received her bachelor of arts degree in English from Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, in 1979. Bonnie is on the board of directors, and a member of, the Hall of Fame of the St. Davids Christian Writer's Conference. She has won three honorable mention awards from Writer's Digest magazine and a special honorable mention from Byline magazine. Her publication credits include, Child Life, Grit, Farm & Ranch Living, Pennsylvania, The War Cry, Pennsylvania Farmer, Dairymen News, Christian Herald, Live, The Christian Communicator, Country Extra, HiCall, Evangel, Women Alive!, Agway Cooperator, and the Harrisburg Patriot News.



Tidy-Brook Elton Sonja-ET, daughter of Sally Cleitus, may become the highest protein cow of the breed in the July run. She was milking 111 pounds per day early May.

ue and interest? If you have something comparable, advertise and go for it."

In the absence of an Excellent homebred cow, the only way to get into merchandising is to buy in with a superior calf, cow or em-

bryo, Alan said.

There is some risk involved, no matter how you get started. The overhead is high, and, "You have to be prepared to wait for your money," Alan said.

The merchandising business is cut-throat, he added. "It's fast-paced to say the least. We started flushing virgin heifers at eight months of age to get the maximum genetic advancement.

"I try to keep up," he said, "but I don't try to take advantage of people."

For Alan, the best reward is when people call for information and say they have talked with people who have visited Tidy-Brook and who say the Sally family is a good honest cow family.

"That means a lot," he said.

High-Selling Calves

"The nice thing about this is that you can take a calf to a sale and wind up on top or near the top," Mark said.

This has happened to Tidy-Brook four times.

At the Pennsylvania Showcase Sale in 1992, they had the second-highest selling calf. At the Eastern National Sale, they had the highest-selling live animal. At the ET Extravaganza in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, they had the highest choice. They tied for highest-selling animal at the 1993 Pennsylvania Holstein Convention Sale.

Alan and Kendra were the only couple from Pennsylvania at the

sale in the Virgin Islands. "You get to meet a lot of people and go places that you wouldn't if you were just milking cows," Alan said.

Tidy-Brook will be selling a first choice female out of Sally Cleitus at the National Holstein Association Convention Sale in Rochester, N.Y. in June.

New Technique

The Meyerses recently started using ultrasound to confirm the sex of 60-75 day-old embryos.

Dr. Ron Kling of Accident, Md., did it for Tidy-Brook for the first time in April. Alan said that since the calves haven't been born "... we don't know if it works." But he has enough faith in the technique to make selling decisions based on it.

He has five pregnancies from a flush cow; normally he would have solicited two or three bull contracts. This time though, because Dr. Kling told him that four of the pregnancies are bulls, Alan went ahead and sold four bulls.

"I don't like to sell them if there's not a good chance I can fill the contract," he said.

Farm History

Mark's grandfather bought the farm in 1910. While the family does not know exactly how old the stone part of the house is, they know it pre-dates the Civil War.

The Hades family, who had several daughters, lived there during

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Tidy-Brook Sally Cleitus is the top cow of the Holstein breed for milk in the nation. She is scored a Very Good 87 with an Excellent mammary. Her USDA cow index is +3,370 pounds of milk, +105 pounds fat, and +107 pounds protein. Her CTPI is +1,513, placing her seventh in the breed.