

# From Madison Avenue To Bradford County In Search Of Farm Life



Bill and Helen Olewnik take a break from the morning milking.

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In 1988 they made the decision to give up successful careers and go into farming.

Not that either had any background in farming — Bill grew up in northeast Philadelphia; Helen hails from Kalamazoo, Mich.

Nevertheless, the two were exposed to agriculture. When they would visit Helen's brother in Michigan, Bill would sometimes go along to his brother-in-law's workplace — a dairy farm.

Bill would tag along while his brother-in-law worked, at the time not aware that city life would soon become unsatisfactory and that he would be considering farming as a career.

But the seed was planted, and when the couple decided to go into agriculture, dairying was the couple's only reference.

Before jumping into farming without having any experience at all, the couple went to New Jersey's Somerset County Extension Office and told the staff that the couple was willing to work free on weekends at whatever farm

would allow novices willing to learn.

The Olewniks were offered work at a horse farm, sheep farm, a beef operation and two dairies.

Bill said he always loved cattle, so he decided to accept an offer from Al Puskas, of Middlebush Farm, located in Somerset County. His first day of work was July 1, 1988.

An extremely hot and humid day, is how Bill said he remembers it. The farmer was harvesting wheat. That day, Bill helped put up 1,000 bales of wheat straw.

Bill said that during that evening, while sitting at the table, felling hot and exhausted, he knew he had found his way of life.

Bill continued working for Puskas and family — Al, Julie and their two sons Bobby and Jimmy.

He said that he not only learned a tremendous amount about farming while working with the family, but he said he also developed a great friendship.

It was through the help of the Puskas that the Olewniks now own

and operate a 225-acre dairy farm and milk 50 cows, Bill said.

The Olewniks didn't just go from "point A" to "point B." Puskas helped them locate a farm that would be suitable for their needs. He traveled miles with the couple, visiting farms and offering advice.

Puskas died recently. The loss has been great, Bill said, adding that Puskas was the Olewniks' great friend and inspiration.

The changes that occurred for Bill during the transition from city to country can be traced through the jobs he held and the situations the family encountered prior to moving into Standing Stone Farm.

After leaving the security of the well-paying typography work, and the guidance from Middlebush Farm, the couple went to work full time milking 200 cows and Helen took care of the heifers.

It was at this farm that Bill learned how to artificially inseminate a cow. He still does that on his own herd, only calling for a techni-

cian when he has failed to get a cow settled on a third try.

The next step the couple took was to rent a farm of their own. With the help of Puskas, the Olewniks pursued an advertisement about a farm for rent in Pennsylvania — in Durell, Bradford County.

Bill and Helen said they fell in love with the area and the people.

On April 1, 1991, the Olewniks started their own dairy in Durell — they bought a herd of 50 cows in New Jersey and moved in.

However, renting was not for the couple. "Renting does not work, or at least in our situation it didn't," Helen said.

With the help of new-found friends in Bradford County, the couple found out about and purchased Standing Stone Farm — already a Dairy of Distinction — located along the Susquehanna River. The farm contained everything the couple needed, and the previous, now-retired owners, Sid-

ney and Fran Lewis, continue to provide advice and help.

At the present, the family dairy farm is operated by Bill, Helen and their children, who do some chores, 11-year-old Jennifer and 6-year-old Mike.

The herd had a rolling production average of 16,000 pounds of milk when it was purchased, and now, with 75 percent of the original herd remaining, it's up to about 18,500 pounds.

Olewniks grow corn and hay and they have a nutritionist from the local feed business to help balance rations for optimum production.

They feed 40 pounds of corn silage per cow, per day in two feedings; free choice hay; and grain four times per day.

Bill and Helen said they learned the importance of cleanliness in farming and pay attention to maintenance details, the result of which

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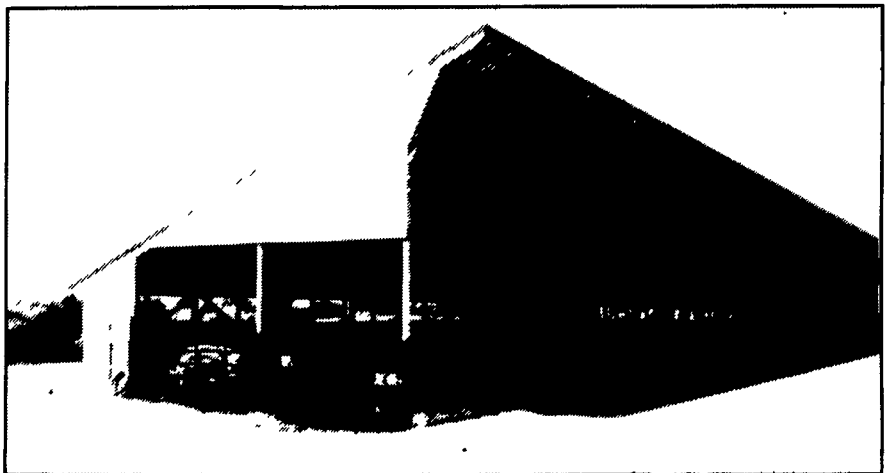
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