

Experience Helps Dairy Farmers Recover From Fire

(Continued from Page A1)

"We'd have been a total loss without them," said LaRue Simpson of the estimated 150 neighbors, relatives, friends, agribusiness leaders, and farmers who converged on the farm even before the firefighters from four local volunteer companies had left.

At one time that day there were so many trucks and livestock trailers parked around the Simpson farm it looked like a fairground, she said.

"It's amazing, even what's going on today," she said two days after the fire, as neighbors dropped off baked goods and friends stopped by to lend a hand in the cleanup operation or just to offer reassurance.

As two friends of the family greeted well-wishers in the kitchen, LaRue sat at the dining room table, fielding telephone calls and trying to keep a record of all the offers of help in a notebook so she could properly thank everyone.

But she realized there was more going on than she was aware of. Undoubtedly she would overlook someone, she said.

LaRue had been in her house about 10:40 a.m. that Saturday when she heard a bang. Something had gone wrong with the tractor running a paper shredder in the barn across the road from the house. It wasn't known immediately exactly where the spark came from, but the shredded newsprint used for the cows' bedding caught fire and the flames spread quickly.

After sounding the alarm to 911, Don and sons Tom and Scott Simpson and hired hand Mike Gahagan tried to fight the fire with an extinguisher kept near the shredder. But it wouldn't work properly. They suspect the extremely cold weather days before the fire may have made the extinguisher less effective.

They abandoned their efforts to fight the fire, and concentrated on

saving the 60 milking cows and nearly 100 heifers, calves and dry cows.

Destroyed along with the barn, according to Simpson, was the John Deere tractor and shredder, a silo unloader, a gutter cleaner, a computerized milk pipeline and bulk milk tank, 300 bales of hay, two tons of cattle feed, about \$400 worth of medicine, and the cows' breeding records and Dairy Herd Improvement Association records.

Don was able to save the milkers, but not before a burning board fell on his shoulder. Gahagan was treated for smoke inhalation at the scene by local ambulance service paramedics and then was treated and released from the Indiana Hospital.

And that's when the help started arriving.

"I don't know where they all came from so quickly," LaRue said.

One group of volunteers started rounding up the cattle that had been chased from the barn. Trucks with bales of hay arrived. A nearby farmer brought a bulldozer to push the still-burning debris into the center of the fire to protect nearby buildings. Other farmers with livestock trailers stood by to transport the cows away from the fire scene. And food and hot coffee was sent in for the workers.

"People who aren't even farmers — people we don't even know — are offering to help rebuild," LaRue said.

"The word just passed from neighbor to neighbor," said Homer City dairyman Ed Nehrig, one of the first farmers to arrive. When the Simpsons decided the Holsteins had to leave, "some of us just took care of getting it done," he said.

Nehrig took 20 of the cows to his farm. The 40 other Holsteins were trucked to the Nick Patterson farm near Blairsville, where a barn with milking equipment was vac-



The fire is believed to have started in this tractor that was running a paper shredder on the barn's second floor.

ant and available. A load of donated hay arrived there even before the cows did, Nehrig said.

The Simpsons are making the 20-minute trip to the Patterson farm twice a day to feed and milk, then returning to their farm to continue the fire cleanup.

Nehrig uses weigh jars to keep track of the Simpson cows' milk production while they're mixed in with his herd.

"The first night we didn't get much milk from them," Nehrig said, noting the cows had been without food and water part of the day of the fire. "But it's amazing how well they're adapting" to their new surroundings, he said, especially since the Simpson barn had tie-stalls and the Nehrig farm has a milking parlor.

Before the fire the Simpson farm had been shipping about 3,500 pounds of milk per day. The day after the fire, milk production from the dislocated cows was about 700 pounds less — still not too bad, in Simpson's estimation, considering all the excitement and disruptions his cows has been through.

Two days after the fire the offers of help continued.

A dairy farmer at the opposite end of the county volunteered some used lumber to make temporary repairs. Neighbors stopped by to clean up more smoldering embers and to help stretch plastic over the end of a shed that had been attached to the barn. The ministers and members of Graystone Presbyterian Church in Indiana wanted to know if they could sponsor an old-fashioned barn raising.

Chris Nehrig, another neighbor who is an electrical contractor, was busy the Monday after the fire reconnecting electrical service to the fire-damaged shed when Marion Center dairy farmers Richard and Wayne Black stopped by.

In the still-smoldering barnyard, Simpson and Dick Black exchanged a knowing handshake. In 1975, the Blacks experienced a similar setback when their barn burned.

The Blacks offered to contribute some wrapped hay they had, and then the three men chatted about how volunteers at both fires had to work to keep the frightened and confused cattle from running back into their burning barns.

Simpson said he would ask for



Two silos were threatened by the fire that leveled the Simpson's 98-year-old barn on their Indiana County Century Farm.

advice from Black — and from the other farmers he knows whose barns have burned — before he starts any rebuilding plans for his own farm.

He's not surprised at the offers

and help he's receiving now. "It's just the nature of farmers," he said. "They stick together." "You feel like you're leaning on people," LaRue said, "But that's what neighbors are all about."

Council Hires Food Service Manager

CHICAGO, Ill. — Brenda J. Leisy has joined the Beef Industry Council (BIC) as manager of food service programs.

In this position, Leisy serves as the BIC liaison with food service operators, distributors, purveyors, and distributor buying groups. She will implement all nationally developed food service programs and assist state beef councils in the

development of state food service marketing programs.

Previously, Leisy was a product manager at Pegler Sysco Food Services Co., Lincoln, Neb. She has also worked as a quality assurance technologist for the Sysco Corporation in Kansas City, Mo. A graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Leisy received a bachelor's in animal science.



Two silos were threatened by the fire that leveled the Simpson's 98-year-old barn on their Indiana County Century Farm.