

# Volunteers Hold Airville Barn Raising

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AIRVILLE (York Co.) — Like a general directing his troops, the construction foreman called out a few, brief words. In a smooth and practiced response from the building crew, a 126-foot long purline rose slowly into place, not with hydraulics or crane lifts, but through the combined precision and strength of experienced hands.

"Higher," commanded the voice again. The long stretch of thick beam inched farther toward its final position as a lengthwise support for the new barn roof at the Hickorymea Dairy Farm, owned by the T. Edwin Johnson family of Airville.

A smoke-stained concrete silo standing next to the angular framing of new, yellow lumber silently recounted an earlier, more tragic, turnout of volunteers. Four months old, dozens of other hands had arrived to battle the January 13 blaze which destroyed the Johnson family's 44-stanchion dairy barn and their year's supply of tons of hay and straw stored in the mows overhead. Only the adjoining milkhouse was saved.

The barn-raising held Tuesday at the Airville dairy farm was a far more upbeat event, with joking, laughter, and a spirit of camaraderie overcoming the bone-chilling dampness and unseasonably cold mid-May weather. Nearly 100 friends and neighbors of the Johnsons joined forces with a barn building crew from the John Ebersole construction firm of Lancaster for a day of literally 'raising the rafters.'

One day earlier, some 50 yards of concrete had been wheelbarrowed into the barn's ground floor, for the remodeled and expanded 60-stanchion milking setup. A tiled feed trough, level with the feed alleyway, and gravity-watering systems are features of the rebuilt facility. Pipeline installation is scheduled for Monday morning, and the Johnson's hope to be milking in the barn by the end of next week.

By day's end, parts of the siding and flooring were completed, and even some sections of tin had been fastened to the peaked roof of the 126-foot by 38-foot rebuilt barn. Several of the hay mow sections inside had also been partitioned off.

"Our builder was pleased at the progress and at all these volunteers who came to work and the

kind of job they did," said Johnson.

Especially interesting to many of the farmer building volunteers was the unique gravity watering system. It's a feature Eddie Johnson admired in the barn of a Lancaster County Amish dairyman he had visited some time ago and adapted for the family's new setup.

"I had decided last year that I wanted to put this kind of system in the barn," said Johnson of the mechanical-device-free waterers. So, when the family made the late winter decision to rebuild, there was no debate on the watering system they would install.

Waterers, one located between every two cows, are fashioned from 12-inch PVC pipe, cut into about 24-inch lengths, stood on end, and the bottoms cemented into the floor. Coming up the center of each 12-inch pipe is a three-inch PVC pipe section, about six-inches long, also stood on end and connected on the bottom to the water supply pipe, laid into the floor around the barn. Water rises into the drinking reservoirs through the smaller pipe inserts in the bottom center. Level of water for all the reservoirs are controlled around the barn by only four valves. This provides a constant, ready supply of water for the cows to drink, from waterers with no mechanical devices to corrode, freeze or burst.

"It's a low-maintenance watering system that can be flushed out for cleaning," said Abbe Johnson Gore, one of the Johnson's five children, all on hand Tuesday to assist with the barn raising and feeding the large crowd of barn-raising volunteers. Abbe and her sister Patty Johnson are both DHIA technicians — Abbe in York and Patty in Lancaster. Some of their testing clients were among the hammer-welding crew. A third daughter, Edwina Shoff, often joins her sisters in helping with the family chores on the Johnson farm.

Eddie, his wife Doris, and their sons Keel and Tom "Chip" Johnson comprise the full-time crew at Hickorymea Farm, with its herd of registered, polled Holsteins. On the morning of January 13, Eddie, Chip and Patty had just finished milking chores and set down at the kitchen table for breakfast. When Eddie saw cows out milling around and rose from his chair to see why animals were running about, he spotted the smoke from



At the call of the construction foreman supervising from the floor below, a main beam running the length of the barn gets hoisted up into place.



A plentiful supply of food, snacks and hot and cold drinks kept workers and volunteers "fueled" for a day of barn-raising construction efforts.

the barn.

While the herd was chased from the barn and saved, the tons of hay and straw in the overhead storage mow added smoldering fuel to a fire that summoned fire companies from several surrounding towns. The Johnsons believe that the fire began in an extension cord used to plug in a tractor motor that morning to warm it up for easier starting.

Several neighboring dairy farms immediately moved cows

from the Johnson herd in with their own animals. Helping to house the Hickorymea cows were the dairy operations of the George Knight family, Donnell Taylor family, David Stewart family, and David Druck family.

Eddie Johnson estimates that the original section of the barn was about a century old, with a second addition added about 25 years later, and a third built on in 1959. He grew up here on the fam-

ily farm and following high school, returned to become a full-time dairyman. In 1970, Eddie and Doris purchased the farm from his parents.

At the end of the busy, productive barn-raising day, a grateful Eddie Johnson was almost at a loss for words to express the family's feelings.

"It's super," he said. "We're really thankful and appreciative of all this help.

"It's sort of breathtaking."

## Milk Prices Decline, BST Not To Blame

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MADISON, Wis. — Farm level milk prices continued to increase during April, but will begin to decline in May. The April Minnesota-Wisconsin price (M-W) increased 22 cents from March to \$12.99 per hundredweight.

The April M-W was 84 cents per hundredweight higher than last year and the highest M-W since August, 1990, when it was \$13.09.

The strength in the M-W was due to rising cheese prices through early April. But, 40-pound block cheddar cheese prices on the National Cheese Exchange started to drop on April 15, and cheddar barrel prices started falling on April 22.

As of Friday, May 13, cheddar

blocks had dropped 19.5 cents per pound to \$1.1975, and cheddar barrels prices dropped 16.5 cents per pound to \$1.2075.

Cheddar blocks were 19.5 cents per pound below what they were a year ago, and cheddar barrels were 15.75 cents per pound below.

### Expect Further Declines

We can expect further declines in the immediate weeks ahead, especially for barrels, since they are 1 cent per pound higher than blocks.

The normal relationship is for barrels to be 3 to 4 cents per pound lower than blocks.

Last year cheese prices did not begin to fall until May 4 for blocks and May 28 for barrels. As a result, last year the M-W increased through May, but topped out at \$12.52 per hundredweight, 47 cents lower than this year's April

M-W. The M-W then fell last year from May to August as cheese prices weakened, reaching \$11.17 per hundredweight.

At this low, cheddar block prices were \$1.21 per pound and cheddar barrels were \$1.15 per pound. While existing cheddar barrel prices are still above this low price, cheddar block prices are lower.

Cheese prices once again began to strengthen in August pushing up the M-W to a peak of \$12.75 for November. With weaker cheese prices towards the end of the year, the M-W fell to \$12.51 for December.

This year, with declining cheese prices in April, the May M-W will decline.

The question is, by how much? The change in milk prices follows cheese price changes.

Although cheese prices have declined by an amount equivalent

to nearly \$2 per hundredweight on raw milk, the M-W will not decline by this amount in May.

But a 75 cents to \$1 per hundredweight decline in the M-W for May is quite possible.

By July or August, the M-W may be below \$11 per hundredweight, which would be below last August's M-W of \$11.17 per hundredweight.

It is quite likely that cheese prices, like last year, could increase late summer and strengthen the M-W some during the fall. But it is not likely that the M-W will rebound to the extent as it did last year.

Nevertheless, because of stronger prices than a year ago for the first 4 months of the year, the M-W could still average, for the year, near last year's \$11.80 per hundredweight M-W price.

Cheese prices, and in turn farm-

level milk prices, are declining despite milk production being down in the Midwest.

April milk production compared to a year ago shows Wisconsin down 7.3 percent, Minnesota down 4.9 percent and Iowa down 4.3 percent.

Each of the states reported fewer milk cows; Wisconsin 6.2 percent, Minnesota 3.1 percent and Iowa 3.4 percent.

Each state also had less milk per cow; Wisconsin 1.2 percent, Minnesota 1.9 percent, and Iowa .9 percent.

These states still suffered from dairy farmers and milk cows leaving the industry and lower feed quality adversely affecting milk production per cow.

But in the West, Southeast and Southwest milk production is booming.

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