

Kids' KOrner

School Kids Have Blast At Walker Grove Farm

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SOMERSET (Somerset Co.) — Second grade kids from the Maple Ridge Elementary School were just like frisky colts in the springtime at the Walker Grove Farm. They romped and rolled over the giant yard. They were thrilled to find a big farm pond nearby. Although their host, Kurt Walker was kept busy chasing them back from the water's edge.

Kurt, his wife, Cindy, their son Daniel, aged three, and grandparents Ray and Ann Walker all live on Walker Grove Farm. It's a pretty place and just the right distance from traffic on four-lane Route 219.

For three days each spring, the Walkers have school children visit their farm. The Walkers give them milk, soft-freeze, and cheese from the Allied Milk Producer's Cooperative, Inc. and tell them about the dairy farm. Some of the kids are also from the Sipesville Elementary School.

The big yellow bus pulled in at noontime. Each person had a packed lunch. They sat on hay bales and on the grass to eat before the tours began.

Grandpa Ray got into a conversation with the bus driver. Grandma Anna and Cindy bustled around serving white and chocolate milk to everybody. Hurt was like the watchdog, making sure the kids didn't wander away to explore anything unsafe. And little Daniel had his own interests, strolling around and chatting to himself, sort of ignoring the group as a whole.

Lewis and Naomi Shaffer helped, too. They are Daniel's other grandparents.

Then one section of kids, with teacher and chaperones prepared for a hayride. Each stepped on a bale then Kurt would assist them into the wagon. Cozy blankets were there to cuddle into because the wind got really strong in some areas.

Before starting the tractor Kurt gave instructions. "Don't put your hands or heads out of the wagon," he said. "And don't stand while the wagon is moving." Then he showed the fluorescent orange warning triangle that is used when farmers take their machinery on the roads. That way drivers of other vehicles can slow down when they see the triangle.

Every so often Kurt would stop the tractor to explain about machinery or seeds and crops. He talked about the corn planter and plows. He passed around jars of corn and alfalfa seeds which make the crops to feed the cows all year.

And then what did Kurt do but pull out fists full of fresh alfalfa at one field. He passed it around, telling the kids that it was okay for them to sample it themselves. One little girl liked it so much she decided to take a bunch along home. "I like it," she said. "It's good."

Most of the others didn't care for it that much.

"We make alfalfa into haylage," said Kurt.

The kids got excited to learn

that Walker Grove Farm is a neighbor to their school principal's home. In fact Kurt took the hayride tractor there to turn around.

Later Kurt said, "We keep our machines a long time because they cost a good bit." He said, "You could buy three or four new cars for what we pay for one machine."

Then he used that word "recycle." "Everything the cows don't use to make milk, we recycle back into the field and spread it with the manure."

The barn tour was Cindy's job. Just outside the barn sat a row of buckets. In them was water, feed, and manure.

Cindy explained that each cow ate and drank that much food and water to produce its milk and so much manure every day. "Cows have four stomachs," she said. Four, wow!

"Are we going to smell manure in the barn?" asked some kids.

"Sure," answered Cindy.

She told them what happens when a cow gets sick and needs medicine. The milk from that cow goes into a separate container so good milk from other cows isn't contaminated.

The sick cow's medicine will be in the milk she gives.

Every one of the Walker's cows has a name. If one is getting medicine a red band is put around her leg.

Cindy said that if some of the contaminated milk would get to the dairy that buys it from the farmer, the farmer could be in trouble. He might have to pay lots of money for the ruined milk of other farmers because milk from many farms is mixed in the big tank of the hauling truck.

The truck driver has a little sample of each farm's milk that is kept for testing. That's how the dairy folks know which farm has contaminated milk.

Cindy warned the kids to be quiet in the barn because the cows weren't used to a commotion. It didn't work. The kids forgot everything she said the instant they saw the big black and white Holstein cows. They tried to pet them but jumped a lot when the cows moved their heads.

She showed them the electric feeding cart where corn, corn silage, and haylage are mixed to feed the cows. Then she demonstrated how the cow's manure is carried away automatically by switching on the system.

Seeing the kids' reaction, Grandma Anna said, "That's what fascinates them more than anything, when cows go to the bathroom."

Cindy pointed overhead to the glass pipeline system which carries milk from the cow to the big 1,000 gallon, refrigerated holding tank. She told the kids how the cow's teats are always cleaned before she is milked. She said that inspectors come sometimes to make sure everything is sanitary. Milk is so important for people's health, that's why it must be kept clean, from the cow to our home refrigerator.

At least one boy thought he would like to be a farmer and

work with the cows.

Anna took the children to see the steer barn. Ray, Lewis and the bus driver kept right on talking.

Kurt and Cindy run the farm

with help from his brother Scott, whose wife is Sally. There are 60 milking cows and about 30 steers.

The farm has 500 acres but 300 are used for crops. Corn is the big

crop, then alfalfa, oats and other grains are raised on the remainder.

"Come back and see me," invited Grandma Anna, as the kids returned to their school bus.



Second graders are getting off their school bus and following Anna Walker to the hay bales in the yard where they will eat packed lunches. The kids are guests at Walker Grove Farm near Somerset.



Kurt Walker of Walker Grove Farm near Somerset explains the corn planter to kids on the haywagon. He also showed them seeds of crops planted at the farm.



A hay bale throw isn't as easy as it looks, as kids from the Maple Ridge Elementary School discovered on a field trip to the Walker Grove Farm near Somerset.



Kids couldn't resist going near Walker Grove Farm's pond while their classes were visiting on a school field trip.