

Bedford Valley Farmers Realize Dream

LINDA WILLIAMS
Bedford Co. Correspondent
BEDFORD VALLEY (Bedford Co.) — When the other kids were playing ball, Brian Zembower played farm.

"Maybe it's because my dad quit farming the year I was born," he said. "But I always wanted to farm. I couldn't wait to grow up and milk cows."

When only a junior in high school, Brian started buying calves and raising them to sell. "But I soon found that most farmers don't want to sell their heifer calves," he said.

"Then, I found a farmer who had 20 head of Holstein and he wanted to sell them all. I talked to dad, and he went along with me. We couldn't find a local bank to back farming, so we went to Lancaster and got the money. Dad had a lot of faith in me to sign those papers."

"We started shipping milk when I was still a junior. However, I soon found I couldn't do it alone. Keeping up with school and milking cows just didn't go together. I asked my older brother, Randy, to help out and he agreed. We became partners, and employed our younger brother, Kevin. Now Kevin is also an equal partner."

Shortly after his high school graduation, Brian and his brothers bought another herd and built a freestall.

"I leaned how to 'make do.' We bought a bulk tank second hand for \$50. If a neighbor had a scraper he was going to throw away, I grabbed it and fixed it for our own use."

Today, the Zembower brothers milk 80 head of Holstein and keep an additional 80. They farm more than 300 acres in fertile Bedford Valley.

Brian is the herdsman and breeds the cows himself, having obtained his license several years ago.

Randy does all of the mechanic work, keeping the machinery running, and Kevin takes care of the feeding.

"We do everything ourselves," Brian said. "We build our own milking parlor, fix our own machinery, breed our own cows, and I do as much of the veterinary work as I possibly can."

They buy most of their grain while raising their own forage.

Brian has developed a somewhat unique breeding system by keeping a Hereford bull with his heifers, who are to be bred for the first time.

"Because they are kept in a pasture several miles from the farm, it is virtually impossible to know when they are in heat," he said. "I tried keeping a Holstein bull with

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Linda Williams has been our Bedford County correspondent since 1989. She continues to enjoy writing about farmers and their joys and problems.

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them, but they got mean and it didn't work. Then, I tried a Hereford and found them to be much more gentle. Because they are smaller, the cow has her first-time birth easier and the calves are very easy to sell. We sell all of our first calves."

Brian, Randy, and his wife Lee handle the milking chores, although Brian's daughter, Amy, 12, is a big help.

"Amy wanted to go to the barn at a young age," Brian said. "She's tall for her age, and once I started using her assistance, I found it was hard to do without. Of course, now she doesn't enjoy it as much."

Holly, who is only 3, loves the cows and spends at least an hour a day helping with milking chores by opening and shutting the gate. "It's amazing how she will stick with it," Brian said.

"I wants to be a farmer," the toddler said proudly.

Daughter, Heidi, 8, hopes to join her older sister with chores this summer.

As with many farm families these days, Brian's wife Faith works in nearby Bedford. Starting as a clerk in the tax assessor's office, she was recently elected as the county registrar and recorder.

"When she first told me she was going to run, I laughed," Brian said. "Then, when I realized she was serious, I did all I could to help her."

Running against four other candidates and virtually unknown as a Democrat in a heavily Republican area, Faith and Brian won the election almost single-handed.

"It wasn't easy," Brian said. "We had to put up signs, knock on doors, attend dinners, and it was all happening in the spring. Fortunately, that spring, we had quite a few rainy days."

Winning the primary easily, Faith continued an uphill battle for the fall election. "That was even worse," Brian said, smiling. "I had corn to be picked and signs to put up and then take down at the same time. I remember telling people I would take the signs down right after the election and I kept my promise, but it wasn't easy."

The family even found a few hours to build a float for the Halloween parade.

One of the biggest problems he sees for the future of the farm is the necessary traveling with machinery on the road. "We've had several close calls and one accident," he said. "It's a problem I just don't know how to avoid, and living along Route 220 — which keeps getting busier — doesn't help."

He also sees BST as a problem for farmers down the road. "I personally hope it phases out," he said. "I don't think it is harmful, but I see other problems. If it increases production, it will lower the milk prices. But, harmful, no. Dairy cows get a lot of things that would have more potential to be harmful than BST."

Still not sorry he chose farming for his lifetime career, Brian does admit that the "thrill of milking has worn off and he takes every other Sunday off to do something with his family."



Brian and Faith Zembower with children Holly, Amy, far right, and Heidi, front.

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