

# Milk To Pay The Bills, Embryos To Make The Money

GAY BROWNLEE

Somerset Co. Correspondent  
BROTHERTON (Somerset Co.) — Last January Joyce Ringler bought her dad's 44 Holstein cows and went into the dairy business for herself. But persuading Jim Ringler that his eldest offspring was the best buyer for the herd was challenge enough for Joyce. They debated the issue about a year.

Joyce was in charge of milking the cows anyway because her dad much preferred crop farming to being with the cows. He markets barley, oats, hay and 110 acres of potatoes that later become potato chips.

An earlier bout with a serious illness had contributed to his lack of interest in the cows, Joyce said. That's why he and Bonnie, Joyce's mother, wanted to sell the cows.

Not only did Joyce, a licensed animal health technician with an associate's degree, need a home for her own few registered cows, she also dreamed of building an embryo transfer business in addition to selling milk. The idea had sprung from her experiences as a cow breeder and a seller of semen which she had done for seven years, between college days and returning to milk cows for her dad.

When she couldn't talk her parents out of selling, Joyce decided she'd have to buy the cows herself if she didn't want to sacrifice the small start in embryos that she had already achieved.

Jim and Bonnie didn't want her to venture into it, but eventually, whether they felt coerced by Joyce or just plain tired of debating, they decided to let her buy the cows. And then they migrated to sunny Florida for a long vacation.

The proverbial roof caved in for Joyce. The cows got acidosis. She says they got sore feet and were very sick. The cause was mold. It had formed in the corn silage and haylage stored in the big silos.

"Moldy feed isn't good for a cow," she stated, "but you don't rely a hundred percent on corn silage, you dilute it with other kinds of feed.

"I think the cows were borderline stress for a long time," she said. "They were milking their hearts out."

"The cows were milking 70 pounds per cow per day in December and they've never dropped below 64 pounds through this ordeal," Joyce said, adding that too much acid in the rumen had caused them to have ulcers.

Two cows died, she said. Another had to be gotten rid of. "Since I started," say Joyce, with an air of resigned acceptance, "I've lost seven, but one wasn't mold related."

At the time, Somerset County was feeling the full force of an old-time winter and Joyce, who has an apartment in a nearby town, stayed at the bicentennial homeplace where she represents the ninth generation of Ringler descendants.

Her mom says Joyce had an advantage by staying there.

But the experience of losing cows after just buying them had the progressive dairy woman seriously considering other options. "I had three opportunities to sell the cows and the third time, I gave it serious thought," she admits.

Now, she says there's no more debate. She has hired a new nutritionist and completely changed the cows' feeding program, and bought another calf at the county sale. Her cows are coming back and Joyce expects better days.

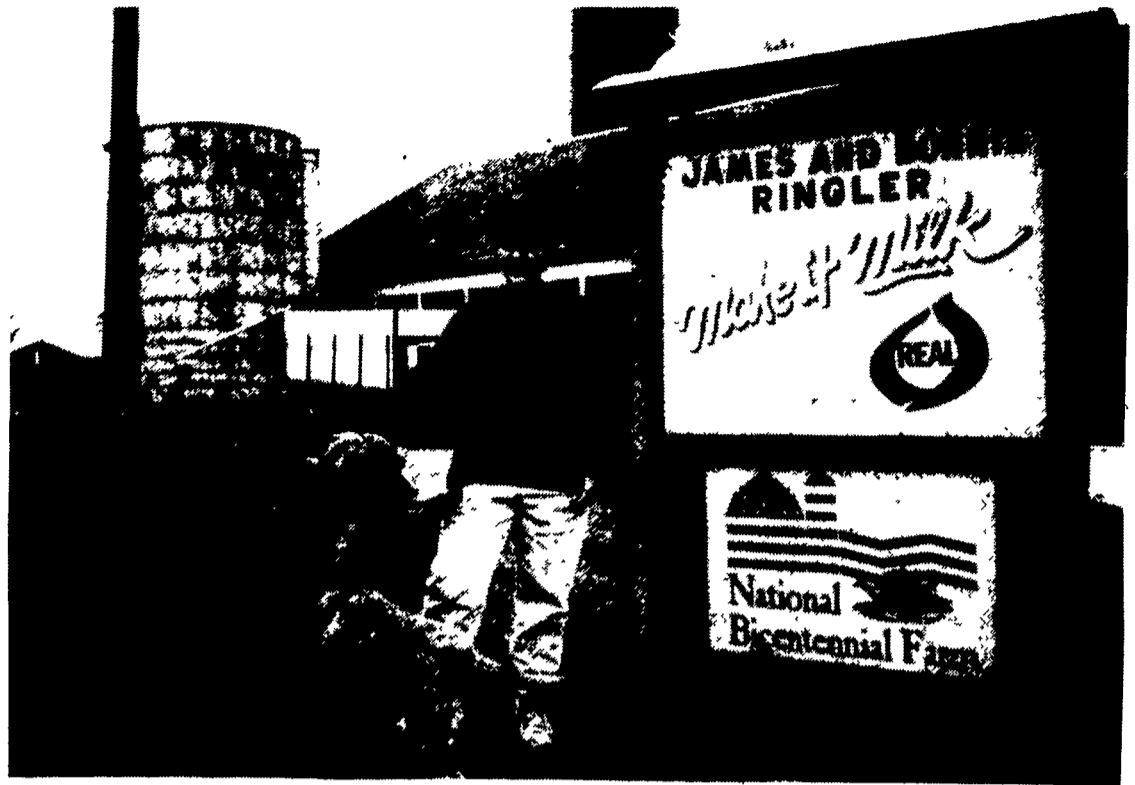
She now says, "I'm getting in deeper and deeper and deeper," alluding to frozen embryos flushed out of a cow last summer when she was in heat.

"I have a lot of promising young stock I'm working on for merchandising purposes," said Joyce.

"To Dad, merchandising is a waste of time, but I'm going to prove to him that it isn't," she added, doggedly.

"I'm out to prove to dad that milking money will pay the bills, but the good money will come from embryos."

She cites an example. "I sold one at a sale that brought \$6100 last year." She says another young heifer that brought



Standing by a rarely seen Bicentennial Farm sign is Joyce Ringler, who's the ninth Ringler generation on the land. Joyce brought her dad's 44 cows last January and plans to build a reputation in the embryo business.

## Homestead Notes

\$3600 went to Illinois.

Joyce says a good cow can be started at three years old such as her own "Sable," a three year old with an excellent pedigree, from a good cow family. Three of Sable's brothers are in stud service, according to Joyce, who already has embryos from the female.

"I've always had an interest in registered cows," Joyce said, "but my interest really grew when I was breeding cows."

Those were the days when she was constantly covering miles in Somerset, Westmoreland, and Fayette counties. "I gave up the breeding of cows

because it was too much," she said. "I was up at five a.m. and often not in bed until (the next) midnight."

Two years have since passed and though she's still a late nighter, Joyce says she feels better now.

One of her registered cows is Ridge N-Valley Bell Nina, ten years. Her record reads 4-03, 365, 31,751m, 1,119f and 998p; and 5-11, 365, 32,668m, 1,173f and 989p.

The rolling herd average is 22,108 milk, 812f or 3.7 percent of fat, protein 3.3 percent or 725p, according to Joyce's official reports.

Joyce says right now she's building records with her best animals. It's crucial to having her name recognized in the business. That's why, when the young heifer went to Illinois, she had reason to be elated.

With her qualifications, Joyce says it's the next best thing to being a veterinarian. She says it's like being a vet's nurse.

"There are cows out there (the barn) that are my buddies," Joyce says, grinning. "They're not stupid. They act stupid, but they aren't stupid. They're my kids," she laughed and proceeded to reveal some of the luxury fare she occasionally shares with them. Things like doughnuts or banana cake—whatever is available.

"They're spoiled," was her unabashed confession.

Joyce, a member of the Somerset County Holstein Club, helps to organize the annual Black and white Show. Her dad is a handy consultant, she says, the kind who doesn't volunteer an answer before the question has been asked.

Joyce has two brothers and one sister.



Joyce Ringler stands with Sable, a 3-year-old cow from a good cow family and with an excellent pedigree. Ringler said she already has embryos out of Sable for embryo transfer purposes.

