



Pennsylvania Star Farmer Shawn Eberly started raising Polled Herefords when he was in ninth grade. Now, the 22-year-old Shawn has 59 head, which are specially bred for breeding purposes. Through careful keeping of records,

Shawn has earned the FFA American Farmer Degree and the Pennsylvania Star Farmer Degree.

'My Heart Is For Full-Time Farming' Says 22-Year-Old

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STEVENS (Lancaster Co.) — Shawn Eberly's goal is to become a full-time farmer. He's 22 years old, has recently received both the American and the Star Farmer FFA Degree, and owns 59 head of Polled Herefords.

Sounds like he's well on his way. But Shawn doesn't foresee a quick transition to a full-time farming career.

For starters, land around here is too expensive, he said. Besides, living at home as a single person saves on living expenses and allows him to pour his full-time salary into buying more cattle. And he can't discount the help from family members pitching in and helping with the cattle.

"I couldn't do it without them," Shawn said of his parents and extended family members.

Shawn's parents, William and Diane Eberly, not only help with the animals but also are flexible in adjusting his work schedule at the family business, E&G Concrete, owned by his parents and Clarence Gebhart. Shawn recognizes that he certainly would not have the flexibility of taking a day off for hay-making or showing cattle if he had

other employers.

Shawn's grandfather, Harry Foreman, owns the farm where Shawn raises the cattle, helps in the hayfield, repairs fences, and assists with many cattle-related duties. His brother, Philip, 19, sister Allison, 15, and cousin Jeremy Gehman fill in.

The family has always been there for each other as his parents have made a conscious effort to teach their children by example to always help each other when help is needed. It's a way of life that they want to see passed on through the generations.

Shawn's mother manages the family's Red Rose Paint Farms, a horse farm where they breed and train registered paint horses. When Shawn began the ag program at Garden Spot High School, he used his work experience with the horses as production ag projects.

"But I always had the notion in back of my mind to work with cows," Shawn said. "Because I didn't know much about them, Pop said that if you want to do it, check with different breeders before you make the decision."

His mother's advice was, "Make sure you get an easy-to-handle breed."

Shawn spent a few years talking about the "in's and out's" of various breeds with those who raised them.

"In my senior year, everything came together," he said.

That was the year that Shawn met Frank Darcey of Darcey Farms, Fairfield, at the Beef Expo. A breeder of registered Polled Herefords, Darcey asked Shawn to accompany the group on the show circuit to Kentucky.

"It was a hands-on education," Shawn said of his work as an apprentice with the Darcey Farm team. "It reaffirmed my desire to raise seed stock."

Darcey advised Shawn on his purchase of five cow calf pairs and a heifer.

His advice from Darcey proved to be profitable. The first year, one of Shawn's herd offspring was selected for the Penn State Bull Test.

"That's where they select 75 head — cream of the crop — of all the different breeds. They take them in October and feed the bulls the same way. They monitor the bulls with a computer collar and keep stats on each one," Shawn said.

In the spring, the bulls that make

it through the process are sold.

Although his first bull was eliminated at the end, since then, Eberly has had four bulls selected and one is now on test.

His success has allowed Shawn to sell most of his stock privately. Most bulls go to commercial herds with the idea of raising the seedstock.

"My whole idea is to raise seed stock to better the breed to produce better meat for the plate," said Shawn, who follows the breed association's guidelines to determine which bulls complement which cows.

Shawn keeps careful records on each calf, which is weaned at 205 days. A feeding program for yearling requires that each be fed grain daily in the amount of one to two percent of body weight.

The calves are born and kept at the home farm until they are weaned. Cattle are put out to pasture for rotational grazing in five to six-acre lots.

"That gets the most use out of the land without wearing it out," Eberly said.

Moisture determines how quickly the herd is rotated. Eberly said, "Last year we had so much moisture, I didn't need to rotate them much."

During the winter months, cattle are fed hay when grass is not plentiful. After the cows are weaned at 600 to 650 pounds or 205 days, they are moved to a rented area about 20 minutes away.

Weight gains average 2.9 to 3.1 pounds a day.

Those animals do not come up

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Abby, an Australian Shepherd, herds the 59-head of Polled Herefords that Shawn raises on his grandparent's farm in Stevens.



Shawn demonstrates the tameness of the Polled Hereford breed by carrying a newborn calf as the mother follows.