

# Young Holstein Breeder

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Doody, who grew up on a Maryland dairy farm, smelled smoke and checked the barn. He found thick smoke pouring out of a small door at the end of the 70-stall, hip-roofed dairy barn, where the herd was tied in overnight.

"You couldn't see your hand in front of your face," related Doody, who pushed his way through the pitch-black and the smoke to begin unfastening cows. He left briefly to wake his wife, Larissa, to call Emergency 911 and rouse the Woods, while he returned to the smoke-filled barn. By alternating running to the doors for gulps of fresh air to soothe his burning lungs, then returning to untie a few more cows, Doody released one side of the tail-to-tail double row of stalls. Larissa tracked his progress from the outside of the long barn, keeping him talking so that she knew exactly where he was and that he was not being overcome by the smoke.

The first of six fire companies was on the scene in minutes and a firefighter assisted Steve Wood in untying the other line of cows. By then, the pile of an estimated 150 bales of smoldering hay in the center of the storage area overhead was eating through the wooden floor, creating enough of an orange-glow to eerily light the barn's dark interior.

"All the doors upstairs and all but two small ones of the first floor were closed. Bob built this barn very solid and tight," Wood said of the concrete block and wood barn built several decades ago by his father-in-law, Bob Gitt.

With hoses hooked up and in hand, the firefighters opened one of the large doors to the upstairs hay storage to gain better access to the smoldering bales. The ensuing draft swept the flames toward the metal roofing, but they were quickly doused as the smoldering hay was flooded with water.

By 8:00 A.M., electrical power was back on and huge mounds of the soggy hay which was pitched down to the center alleyway through the burned holes in the ceiling had been hauled to nearby fields. Hundreds of gallons of water had swept from the barn by friends and neighbors who arrived to help.

"We are so blessed," says Chris Wood, who was restrained by firemen when she tried to rush into the dense smoke to help untie the herd. "I've always been a Christian; I consider it a miracle. Scott

came home early for a reason; the barn doors were closed which kept the draft out. The barn and the herd could easily have been destroyed."

One cow in a stall beneath where the largest hole burned through the ceiling suffered slightly-singed marks dotting the white hair of her rump, where the Woods believe hot embers fell on her. The couple marveled at how calm the cows had remained through the crisis, with only a few coughing as they exited the barn under the 20-foot length of burning ceiling wood and the dense smoke, and quietly walked to the pasture's distant corner.

"They came up to me when I went out to the pasture with a flashlight, after things were getting under control at the barn, and acted like they wanted to know what was going on," Chris relates of the Wood's terrifying, early-morning ordeal.

An area fire marshall determined the blaze to be of electrical origin, believed to have started in an elevator system installed two years ago in the second-floor hay storage area. However, Steve had been in the hay storage area at evening milking just hours before the fire and noticed nothing out of order.

Though Chris got little sleep in the first nights following the fire, their dairying backgrounds have made the Woods cognizant of the disasters with which family farmers must often contend. Chris was raised on the Penn Gate farm that is the family's home, while Steve's family dairied in northern Virginia. Both grew up with a love of showing cattle and met in 1984 during dairy heifer competition at the Maryland State Fair at Timonium.

Following graduation with a dairy degree from Virginia Tech, Chris worked for an embryo transfer firm headquartered near the university. Steve worked at Fair Hill Farm on Maryland's Eastern Shore and at the former Bayville Holsteins, Virginia Beach. He also spent some time working with Maryland cattle sale and auction firm of the late Doty Remsburg.

Having traveled in their respective jobs, both grew weary of the constant need to keep moving from place to place. Both have also seen devastation that drought can wreak on crop production and have instead chosen to focus their energies instead on the herd, rather than on extensive acreage



Hay smoldering in storage above the dairy herd left a few gaping holes in the wooden ceiling. Cows calmly exited the barn beneath the burning ceiling.



A slightly-discolored section of roof on the barn at Penn Gate Farms is the only visible sign outside of a fire that threatened the well-known Adams County registered Holstein herd.



Scott and Larissa Doody get acquainted with "Clara," a December registered Holstein from one of Penn Gate's deep pedigreed cow families. The calf is a gift to the Doody's to thank them for summoning help and chasing cows from the smoke-filled Penn Gate dairy barn last Saturday.

and field equipment investment. Most hay is purchased and some planting and harvest chores custom-contracted.

"People get in trouble when they try to focus on everything, so we prefer to focus on the cows," the Woods agree. Chris's dad, Bob Gitt, gets credit as the farm's "Mr. Fix It," who keeps the buildings well-maintained, helps with their extensive showing schedule.

The Woods took over the day-to-day operation of Penn Gate after their marriage in 1986. Today, the all-registered Holstein herd of 73 head averages 21,466 milk, with a 4.1 percent and 879 pound butterfat average, and a 3.4 percent and 730 pound protein average. A high-type herd, Penn Gate has 20 Excellents and 32 Very Good individuals, equating to an impressive 109.7 BAA.

"Our goal is to maintain what we started with, because today you can lose genetics in one generation. We breed for functional type, which leads to cow longevi-

ty," Steve says in summarizing their philosophy. "And we breed for what we want first and then secondly for a balance of index in the pedigree."

That the Wood's philosophy pays off at the milk tank as well as the show ring is evidenced in their last DHIA test day results. Twelve of their top producers milked over the hundred-pound mark, including one finishing with 140 pounds and another at 132 pounds.

Marketing and merchandising is an integral part of the Penn State business plan and focuses primarily on their "Fashion" family, which traces back to a 4-H animal owned by Chris. Fashion was scored EX-92 and the dam of the bull, "Foreman," a Blackstar son at Landmark Genetics, showing impressive sire summary results. A Leadman daughter from the same family topped the 1994 state Holstein convention at Gettysburg and was purchased by the internationally-known Lylehaven

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