

Pleasant Valley Farm Finds Success In Diversification And Marketing

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BROOKEVILLE, Md. — For 31 year-old Randy Stabler, the two sides to the equation needed to farm 3,500 acres of expensive farmland within 25 miles of Washington, DC, are diversification and marketing. Stabler farms in partnership with Robert, his dad; Drew, his uncle, and Fred Lechlinder, his brother-in-law. The operation goes by the name Pleasant Valley Farm.

For diversification, Stabler grows corn, soybeans, wheat, hay and the offspring from 150-cow beef herd. A complement of tractors, combines, trucks, and planting and haying equipment take care of producing the crops. A lot of the maintenance work on the equipment is done in on-the-farm shops. In a mini-feedlot the calves are fattened for a local meat market.

"We don't put all of our eggs in one basket," Stabler said. "In my wife Judi and two little girls Kelsey, 3, and Shelby, 6 mos., I do. But not in the farming operation. The variety of farm enterprises keeps us going. When one is down, the others carry the wheel. I'm not here to just be in farming. I treat it like a business, and I want my business to be successful." This seventh-generation farmer in Montgomery County said he has tremendous respect for his dad and his uncle. "They have given me every opportunity in the world. They have made it easier for me, and I would like this feeling to be part of the story."

And while Stabler said his grandfather was also successful, times have changed, and the opportunities in today's farming climate are not the same.

"I can't go out here and plant 1,800 to 2,000 acres of corn and expect to sell it in October or

November to my local broker/elevator and live the lifestyle I want for my family. This is a very large picture. My grandfather was darn successful. He had a marketing plan, but he never wrote it down. I don't see the same opportunities for me. With the need for a return on my investment and my cost of growing a commodity, I can't sell it for just what it is costing me to grow it. Therefore, I need to figure where I am going to make up the difference."

Most farmers follow the markets, even subscribe to the newsletters of professional analysts. But the Stablers have taken this a step further. They subscribe to the recommendations of three or four professional commodities market analysts and authorize their broker to place hedges according to the percentages of their crop they have designated to be traded under the recommendations of each professional. If one professional has a bad day, maybe another will have a good day.

Since the commodities market is highly leveraged, Stabler never puts the total expected crop on the market before the crop is harvested. In addition, as the season progresses, if because of drought or other problems the expectation for the harvest is diminished, he gives notice to change his hedges accordingly. And he is prepared for margin calls if they come.

"I do this for ease of mind, Stabler said. "When I'm out on the corn planter or sprayer, it's not a priority for me to market grain."

"The track record says the professional analysts have done so much better at marketing corn or soybeans than I have. So why not follow their advice? How many times have you seen farmers not be successful because they planted a



Randy Stabler, in cab, is the seventh-generation farmer in Montgomery County. With him from left, is Uncle Drew, Robert, his dad, and Fred Lechlinder, his brother-in-law. They farm 3,500 acres in Montgomery County.

crop with no marketing plan and turned around and sold the crop at the lowest point of the market? We are not speculators. We are using our own commodities on true hedges and it is a marketing tool I use, and it is working," Stabler said.

As for farming in the shadow of the Washington monument, Stabler says he favors a balance between development and preservation of farmland. There is still a lot of agriculture in Montgomery County, but development is expanding also. He calls this expansion progress and said he would not want someone to come

in and with the stroke of a pen to stop the development without compensation for "ripping away my equity from me in land values on some of the land we own."

Much of the ground the Stablers farm has been in families for generations and the relationship between these families and the Stablers is good and long lasting. "We try to be good stewards of both the land and to the owners of the land," Stabler said.

In the future, Stabler believes agriculture is changing for the better. Farmers are doing a better job of telling their story. "I believe we have gotten on top of the fact that

we are not the bad guys that society was trying to make us out to be," Stabler said. "Science and data are coming around to support us on this theory."

"Government's role will be less, which may not be all that bad in the long-term but could be stifling in the short-term. The good farmers will manage this, and the bad managers won't."

"And consumers will have to pay for more of what they are beating on us for. If we are doing something wrong, according to society, and we must change, the consumer will bear the cost rather than agriculture taking the full brunt for the cost of this change."

Bogle Distinguished Alumnus

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science has named T. Roy Bogle, one of the nation's top cooperative extension educators and administrators, as its 1995 Distinguished Animal Science Alumnus.

Bogle was born in DuBois. He embarked on an extension career in 1959 as a student in a Penn State Cooperative Extension summer training program in Venango County.

Upon graduation from Penn State in 1960 with a bachelor's in animal husbandry, Bogle accepted a position as county extension agent in Ohio, first in Jefferson County, then in Conshocon County, where he developed the highest ever 4-H enrollment and achieved the project completion record for both counties. Before long, he was appointed chairman over the total county program. During that time, he was involved in a sizable swine production project and earned a master's degree in agricultural education at Ohio State University.

In the 1970s, Bogle accepted a position at Purdue University to study the economics of swine production and, at the same time, he earned a second master's degree, this one in agricultural economics. He then enrolled in a doctoral program in agricultural economics at the University of Missouri, where he also taught courses in farm

management.

His next position was as area extension economist with the cooperative extension service in southwest Kansas. Within two years, he was promoted to extension economist at the main campus of Kansas State University, where he coordinated the programs in five areas of the state. Bogle computerized the field application of all farm management programs, developed a statewide education program for farm estate planning, and coordinated the Kansas School of Agricultural Banking.

In 1980, Bogle accepted a position as assistant director, agriculture and natural resources, University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. During a four-year stint there, he was responsible for coordinating educational programs with more than 300 cooperative extension professionals, as well as heading several prestigious committees and organizing conferences. He also participated in two eight-week assignments, first in 1981 as part of a small team of consultants to China on agriculture statistics and farm planning and then in 1983 as part of a staff of 24 charged with designing a teaching, research, and outreach program for a new agricultural university in Pakistan.

In 1984, Bogle took over statewide program leadership of Oklahoma's Cooperative Extension Service. He helped rewrite a grant



T. Roy Bogle

proposal to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for \$860,000 that helped to put satellite dishes in 77 cooperative extension offices. He also helped initiate the use of computers in all extension offices and served as chairman of the Southern Rural Development Center, the Southern Region Extension Directors, and the Southern Region Low-Impact Sustainable Agriculture Council.

As part of a year-long USDA project with Oklahoma State in 1992, Bogle served as senior extension advisor to Armenia's Ministry of Agriculture, helping to establish an extension service there.

Delegates Approve Merger

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — The nation's third largest dairy cooperative was formed recently with the merger of Milk Marketing Inc., based in Strongsville, Ohio, and Eastern Milk Producers, Syracuse, N.Y.

The merger became effective April 1, by a vote of delegates, with each cooperative holding its own separate voting meetings.

The consolidated cooperative has retained the name of Milk Marketing Inc., while also incorporating the "cow's head" logo of Eastern.

The combined membership now sits at 9,000 family farms, including 1,600 affiliates, in 11 states from Indiana to Vermont.

The merged dairy cooperative is the third largest nationally, in terms of total milk handled, and fourth nationally, in terms of

The group worked under considerable hardships during a time of great political upheaval in Armenia, going for days and sometimes weeks without fuel for cooking, heating, or even pumping water.

Shortly after returning from Armenia in 1993, Bogle retired from the Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service. When not traveling the country in their 30-foot recreational vehicle, he and wife Carol live in Hot Springs Village, Ark. They have two grown children, Alan and Laurie.

member-milk marketed.

The consolidated business will market and process almost 7 billion pounds of milk per year, valued at about \$1 billion.

Headquarters will be in Strongsville, while the Eastern headquarters is to be a regional MMI office.

In a joint statement from Herman Brubaker, chairman of MMI, and Lewis Gardner, president of Eastern, the merger represents "an historic event for dairy farmers and their cooperative."

On March 28, in Corning, N.Y., 93 Eastern delegates voted unanimously to approve the merger. Those delegates represented 3,808 farms, or 99 percent of membership.

The next day, at MMI's meeting in Columbus, Ohio, 182 delegates also voted for the merger. Coincidentally, the number of MMI delegates voting also represented 99 percent membership.

Members now own several manufacturing and marketing facilities.

Included are Farmers Dairy Foods Inc., with four manufacturing plants in Pennsylvania, Indiana and Ohio; a mozzarella cheese plant in Waverly, N.Y., operated by Leprino Foods; Eastern Laboratory Services, a food and environmental testing subsidiary; and Eastern Best Products, a food and farm product distribution subsidiary.