

When It Comes To Production, Van Blarcoms Are Top In State

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 Bradford County Correspondent
COLUMBIA CROSS ROADS
 (Bradford Co.) — Ask Robert Van Blarcom what the key is in maintaining his high herd average and he'll mention several things. At the top of his list are switching to TMR, milking three times a day, and better genetics.

Van Blarcom began farming in 1977 with his parents, William and Mildred Van Blarcom. Prior to that he attended two years of college and worked in Frederick, Md., installing milking equipment.

Unlike some, Van Blarcom admits that farming was not his lifelong ambition. In fact, he laughs at how he fell into farming.

"I told my brother, Jim, that I was thinking about it. I was working on other people's farms and saw all these people working in the city and I said 'they're walking away from nice places.' I was in Frederick County, so it was kind of

an expensive, growthy area. I thought that while they were working in the city, their farms were going down the tubes. Then I looked up and thought, it's not the same up there (in Bradford County). Ground isn't worth sick-em up there next to what it was down here. So I told Jim I was thinking about coming back to the farm — it was just a thought. He told my parents that I was."

After realizing that his brother had told his parents, Van Blarcom decided to talk more seriously about coming home to farm.

"When I said something to (my parents) they said, well, we're going to have to add a couple of silos and double the size of the herd. So they had gone that far with the planning. Then I felt if they were willing to do that much for me, that we'd go for it," he noted.

So he made the move. They increased the herd size to 74 milk-



The Robert Van Blarcom family farm is located on a picturesque knoll in Northwestern Bradford County. The farm has been in the family since 1958.

ing and dry cows and started farming together.

In 1980, Van Blarcom married his wife, Donna, an Elmira College graduate with a degree in biochemistry. Although Donna worked off the farm for a couple of years, she is an integral part of the farming operation. The couple has four children, Shelly, 11; Jonathan, 9; Melissa, 8; and Elizabeth, 6.

Today the family has 88 cows on test.

"We've more than doubled production, but we've only increased five or six cows since we started. I've got a slip somewhere that says 12,800 pounds for herd average. That was our first year," he said.

In the past two years, the Van Blarcoms have been at the top of the list on the state DHIA reports with a herd average in excess of 29,000 pounds of milk. They've been in the top 10 for milk for the last five or six years.

"We were within 150 pounds of 30,000 at one point but we didn't stay there. That wasn't a goal, it just happened," he explained.

Their year-end average for 1994 was 29,136 pounds of milk, 906 pounds of protein, and 934 pounds of fat.

Their April 1995 test was slightly higher at 29,490 pounds of milk, 940 pounds of fat, and 909 pounds of protein, on 90 cows. About one-third of the cows in the herd are at 30,000 pounds or above in milk production. They've had a few cows stretch to the 40,000 pound mark.

Two-year-olds are expected to work as well.

"I expect a 2-year-old to make 23,000-24,000 pounds. We have a group of them that, right now, are doing a nice job. They're averaging about 100 pounds," he said "It used to be if you got a 100-pound 2-year-old you were pretty happy. I'm still happy with a 100-pound 2-year-old."

The Van Blarcoms average 90 pounds in the tank about six months out of the year and run a somatic cell count of 250,000. Their milk is marketed through Milk Marketing Incorporated.

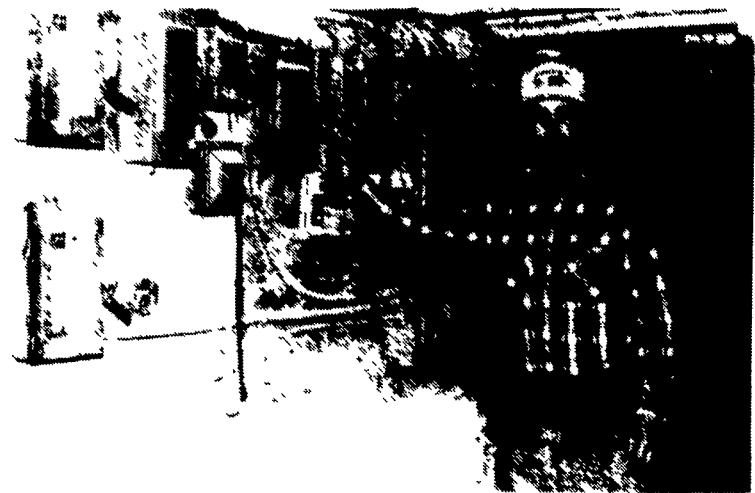
"We were Eastern members. I've been a co-op member since I started farming," he said.

In their search to increase production while controlling feed costs, the Van Blarcoms switched to a TMR in January of 1989.

"That saves a lot on feed costs, because we buy ingredients instead of total mixes. We always have shelled corn, soybean meal, roasted beans, bakery by-products, cottonseed — we keep most of them on hand and buy them by the truck load."

Van Blarcom deals directly with the feed brokers. If they have the

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With a flip of a few switches, Robert Van Blarcom can control his TMR mix. He designed his setup, which includes scales, timed augers, and a roller mill.

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So many people have told me that there's no better place to raise a family than on a farm. Here I am holding Charlie, while my husband, Paul, holds Gregory.

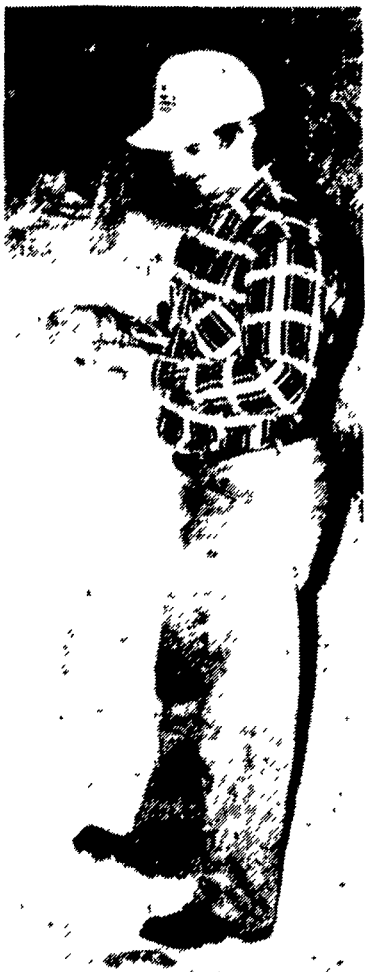
Home for me is in the southeast corner of Tioga County, not far from Bradford and Lycoming counties. Many view this area as nothing more than prime hunting ground - a testimony that is heard on opening day of just about every season with the roar emanating from a steady stream of traffic. For my family, however, this is home regardless of the season and to us the area means dairying.

I grew up on a 500-acre Jersey farm not far from where I live now. After graduating from Penn State with a degree in agricultural science and a minor in dairy and animal science, I returned to the area and began my journalism career at a regional farm newspaper based in Bradford

County.

Home is now a 325-acre Holstein and Jersey farm where my husband, Paul, farms with his parents. We now have two sons, Charlie and Gregory, and are expecting our third child early August - just in time to take to the fairs!

In the short year that I've been writing for *Lancaster Farming*, I've been privileged to meet many new people and renew old friendships in the farming community. I hope through my writing, that I'll be able to put a spotlight on farming northern Pennsylvania. After all, there's more to the area than deer, bear, and turkeys!



Robert Van Blarcom inspects a handful of whole cottonseed from the bin on his barn floor. Van Blarcom began buying individual commodities after switching to TMR in early 1989.

HOMESTEAD NOTES



Robert and Donna Van Blarcom have always included their four children in the farm activities. Pictured counterclockwise from the top are, Shelly, 11; Jonathan, 9; Elizabeth, 6; and Melissa, 8.