

Van Blarcoms Are Top In State

(Continued from Page B3)

to get 60 pounds a cow average, there's no point in milking them three times a day. If you're going to get 90 pounds, well, you might as well take the pressure off the udders."

The Van Blarcoms also pay close attention to their genetic program, not necessarily to use only the top bulls, but to ensure the potential for high milk production while maintaining the strength needed.

"The herd is about 80 percent registered cows," said Van Blarcom. "All the milk cows are AI bred. We have a cleanup bull for the heifers."

If Van Blarcom does not have a bull that he wants to use, he will often select one from other "breeder-dairymen" in the area.

"I wouldn't call us breeders," Van Blarcom said. "We have a lot of registered cows and we breed a lot of AI, but we're not classification and type breeder farmers. Some people would call us breeders, but I won't. There's a lot of good dairymen who spend a lot more time knowing every cow's pedigree back three or four generations. I may know what they eat, but I may not know their pedigree back that far."

No matter what the emphasis of the dairyman, whether it's strictly milk production, breeding cow families or high quality feed, the bottom line for Van Blarcom is economics.

"I hope I put more emphasis on appropriately June than a big dish of fat, ripe, red strawberries?"

Served up, of course, with the favorite "fruit" of our dairy cows — a great, big, dish of vanilla ice cream.

That alone makes June worth waiting for through the other 11 months of the year.

the economics, the dollars and cents of it," he said. "If I was a breeder and was selling cows for the kind of money that some of these guys do, that may be more profitable than what I'm doing now, but it's not my cup of tea."

When selecting bulls he sets the following criteria, "I like them to be even on protein or above and I don't want them too far minus on type. I've always got to have milk."

He works closely with the inseminator to make improvements where necessary.

He mainly culls for production, but also weeds out the problem cows.

"I don't cull type for type's sake. I cull cows if, for example, her feet are bad and she's not going to give enough milk, or if there's too much improvement to make, I'll put somebody better in the stall. I'll probably cull production first. As long as I've been doing it, I've been culling production. With a stall barn, we only have so many stalls to work with and you just have to get more milk per stall," he said.

Since being at the high producing level, Van Blarcom has learned the fine points of managing his herd.

"I get as much milk as I can and keep the cow healthy and not (hurt) her rumen. If you over grain them, you're going to get the grain in the manure and you're going to lose production. I don't think I push them more than they're capable of. If I do push them too far, it's going to cost me money," he said.

During the summer months, the Van Blarcoms keep two full-time hired men to help with field chores and the milking. One works mainly with the equipment while the other takes care of the heifers and works in the field.

Although other farmers have

plenty of bad luck with their hired help, Van Blarcom admits that they've been pretty lucky. He also realizes that it takes a "people person" to manage a hired labor force.

"The next generation of farmers are not going to be the best milkers, the best tractor drivers — that's not going to be the dairyman. I think the next generation is going to be people handlers," he said.

As for the future of the dairy industry, the Van Blarcoms have a positive outlook.

"I'm guardedly optimistic," said Van Blarcom, "Because there's no point in being any other way if you're going to be in this business."

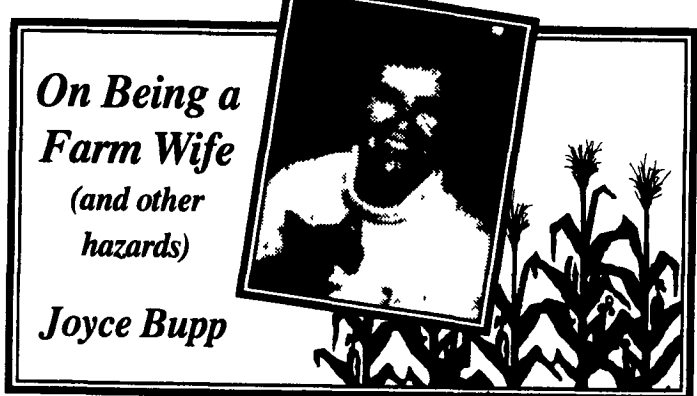
As for the political agreements that are in the works, Van Blarcom sees a brighter future, although the short-term situation is not favorable.

"The dairy farmers took it on the chin for the first half of GATT, because we're competing with foreign governments instead of other dairy farmers. We can compete with anyone's dairy farmers, but we can't compete with other governments. They're going to let quite a few dairy products in under GATT, and we can't export because we don't have the export base to work from. If we keep increasing our base over the next two or three years, if they follow the rules, soon we'll be on the same playing field."

Would he encourage his four children to get into dairying?

Van Blarcom said, "I will encourage them to do their own thing, but I would not discourage them to farm if that was their choice."

"Somebody's going to be making milk, and if you're capable of doing it, I can't think of a better place to raise a family. We're optimistic and we're going to be here."



On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)
Joyce Bupp

What do the month of June and Election Day evening have in common?

Both are when the "early returns" start to roll in.

Those "early returns" are the first fruits of the plantings over which farmers and gardeners have labored through April and May, and for some crops, year-round.

For farmers with traditional field crops, the most intense part of the spring-planting rush is past, and rows of green seedlings are emerging in neat rows. Now, we turn our full attention to the first fruits of that ongoing summer farm chore of harvesting - haymaking.

The sweet fragrance of new-mown hay, warm and wilting from the afternoon sun, is one of those signature smells of June country living. With the storm windows nudged up into summer storage position, the breezes gently wave the hay scent right into the house through the open, screened windows.

Just as a reminder of what makes those "first fruits" (and those that follow) grow, the scent of manure mingles with the hay, as one last heifer pen is cleaned out for the summer and its contents recycled back to Mother Earth.

Along with hay perfume come whiffs of the roses opening their first fruits. Their lovely blooms are a true harbinger of June, the queen of flowers in a myriad of colors. Though they will bloom intermittently through the rest of the summer, June is when the roses go "all out" in parading their graceful beauty.

Hours of work in the vegetable garden — planting, hoeing, hauling and laying down mulch — also begin their payback of yields. Reluctantly, we bid farewell to the

wonderful, sweet asparagus, as the lingering stalks become fewer, thin and tough. Those will be left to mature and return strength to the roots toward next spring's yield.

But fat and thick, almost at the asparagus' feet, comes a lush row of Red Sails loosehead lettuce. With typical, gung-ho-gardener abandon, I sprinkled the remains of a pack of three-year-old seed into a market-pack flat weeks ago. Every seed must have sprouted.

The largest of the lettuce clusters now spreads more than a foot across, giant rosettes with tender yellow-green infant leaves at the center. In contrast are the wide margins of lovely maroon scalloping the edges of the deeply-inked, dark green mature leaves.

Mixed with the spinach a kindly neighbor and fellow-gardener keeps sharing, the Red Sails lettuce makes a beautiful, tasty and nutrition-packed salad. And a timely garden "fruit" to have ready, with lettuce fields destroyed by floods around the country.

As if to apologize for the destruction of last year's orchard crops, this season appears to be abundantly blessed with berries and fruits. Our young blueberry bushes I feared to be lost instead appear quite healthy. In fact, the largest promises to yield about a cup of berries, if I can persuade our backyard birds that since I grew 'em, I also intend to eat 'em. A bit of plastic netting draped over the fruiting bush may make that point.

Though our strawberry patch faded away over the last two years, fortunately lots of others around the area fared better. So while our new plants are sinking roots and spreading runners, we can still enjoy June's most famous and tasty first fruit. What could be more

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