

Derr Family Farm Is Profile Of Continuity, Experimentation

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DAWSON (Fayette Co.)—Adam Derr Sr. began dairy farming while in high school. He bought his first farm in 1971, while working in construction.

Now, with wife Janice, son Adam Jr., 22, and daughters Rebecca, 19, and Diana, 22, he has been farming on a 76-acre home farm in Dawson for the past eight years.

This past month the family was working to complete a double-six herringbone milking parlor for use three-times per day on the farm's 85-head Holstein milking string, while also trying to complete spring planting on the home acres and 300 additional rented acres.

Their family business strategy appears to be to meld continuity with experimentation, and to maintain day-to-day operations while reaching out to the community and the future.

When they first moved to the present farm, the family combined equipment that came with the new farm and equipment they brought from the old one.

At the time, the new farm included a house, machine shed, barn and two silos.

Over the past eight years, the Derrs have built three silos and added a heifer barn.

They use a soil conservation plan and a combination of no-till, chisel plow and low-till field preparation to raise crops, including corn for silage and high moisture corn, alfalfa, and soybeans.

Adam Jr. started working full-time on the farm in 1989. Through his initiative, the family purchased a highly rated Holstein heifer, that he compared in expense to buying a new pickup truck.

As an investment, Adam Jr. said he knows it's a risky venture, but if the sale of embryos goes flat, the farm can still benefit from the quality of genes. The farm's goal is

to increase production per cow, rather than expanding the herd size.

The cow they are counting on for genetics is Ha-Ho Tesk Melinda-ET, classified as a Very Good-85 percent. That is a strong rating for a first lactation cow.

Melinda is a daughter of Osdel-Endevor Bova Cubby. Her estimated first 305-day lactation, on a twice-per day milking schedule calculated out to production of 24,360 pounds of milk, 810 pounds of butterfat, and 701 pounds of protein. Her index is a PTA of +92P, +1.40#, and +1,308 PTPI.

The family is working with veterinarian Ron Kling, of Accident, Md., in a program of flushing and implanting. The plan is to offer some of the offspring for sale, rather than keeping all for herd replacements.

The move to marketing genetics has created additional levels to the farm's business.

First, the animal was bought sight unseen, which was a new experience for the family. A facsimile (fax) machine was purchased and installed in order to communicate more effectively and quickly with potential clients.

Also, more services were required from consultants and specialists. This required more time and study to adjust and keep on top of decision-making.

Tongue-in-cheek, Adam Sr. said, "Buying that heifer might have been the cheap part!"

There are other things keeping the Derrs active.

Adam Sr. is active in the Dairy Herd Improvement Association (Pa.DHIA), both as a member and past president of the Westmoreland County affiliate. (He is a member of Westmoreland County DHIA, even though he lives in Fayette County.)

He also serves as a leader with the Westmoreland County Holstein Association, currently in the position of a state director.

As a family, the Derrs intend to attend the National Holstein Convention set to be held this year June 25-28 in Pittsburgh. It is to be their first experience with the national convention.

But they have been involved with helping with the convention in several ways.

Adam Sr. is a member of the convention sale committee, which coordinates the consignments, and arrangements necessary to ensure a successful sale. Offered are to be a spectrum of genetics from pick-of-flush embryos to mature, well-built cows.

Janice has been doing her own part in helping to organize a "Cultural Pittsburgh" tour for convention goers.

The family is also outgoing to the area's community, offering their farm in 1993 to serve as a site for the county Farm-City Day activities.

Janice is also involved with the Westmoreland County Dairy Promotion Board. She has done such jobs as filling helium balloons printed with the words, "Drink Milk," and handing them out during the Farm-City Day event, and at the county fair.

She also has helped with scooping ice cream at a local hardware store for a promotion, when the store owner provided the ice cream, among other activities, such as conducting a promotion event through distributing literature along with ice cream cones at a Scottdale store.

During the Christmas season,



As hosts of the 1993 Fayette County Farm-City Day, Adam and Janice Derr stand on their lawn welcoming people interested in learning about dairying. The bell in the background came from Adam's grandparents' farm.



Eric Kirby, son of Mark and Linda Kirby of Connelsville, gets a chance to see a close-up of a calf during Farm-City Day activities at the Adam and Janice Derr family farm.



Janice Derr fills a balloon promoting the drinking of milk to give away to visitors attending Farm-City Day activities at the Derr's farm.



Adam Derr stands in his farm's parlor, where he milks about 85 Holsteins. He said he expects that a new double-six herringbone parlor will help with the family's experiment to switch to three-times-per-day milking.

Janice also has taken to helping to decorate a tree that represents county dairy interests at a Sheraton Inn, in Greensburg, one of about 40 trees displayed there annually representing various professional and business interests.

Her tree is hard to miss, with decorations of ceramic cows, cheese and crackers, and red barns.

And while Adam said that activities such as opening their farm to the public for Farm-City Day does nothing for their immediate bottom line, it is a reflection of his attitude to get working now to build the future, whether it be in business or relationships.

