

Dairy, Diversity, Education Are Heart Of Friendship Farms

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MEYERSDALE (Somerset Co.) — Friendship Farms in Meyersdale, owned by Jim and Doris Stutzman, thrives on diversity, according to Jim.

Actually operating on two farms, the Stutzman family has its hands in several pots.

Besides milking some 58 head of Holsteins, they raise a few beef cattle (20 Angus calves, heifers and bulls), and corn, oats, rye and hay.

Most years, maple syrup also joins the commodities. Everything the farm doesn't need is sold.

"We diversified because prices run in cycles," Jim said. "You try to hit the high sides. When the price of crops is off, you can run them through the animals.

"We don't use any no-till. We use some rotational grazing, but not with paddocks. Most of ours are pastures that are non-tillable, but have water sources," he said.

A hundred acres are sown with corn. Oats and rye each claim 60 to 70 acres. Hay covers the rest of the land that isn't wooded or otherwise unfit for cultivation.

The two properties trace back through Doris's side of the family — the Millers — for about 200 years.

One of the farms was sold years ago. However, 20 years ago, Jim and Doris purchased the adjacent farm to get it back within family ownership.

It's a decision they've never regretted, they said, especially since Doris's father, Ernest "Pap" Miller, died unexpectedly last October. His lifelong wish, Doris said, was to keep both farms within the family.

The Stutzmans have two children Becky, 23, and Marty, 19, who represent the eighth generation on the farm.

Diversity has enabled the Stutzmans to keep the operation going and the family on the farm.

In addition to doing farm work,

Jim has been a junior high school science teacher for 20 years.

For most of his additional farm labor, he has had students from the high school work during summers, helping with haying, and chores.

"They (the students) juggle with other employment and school sports," Jim said. "We've used school kids for years. As the seniors move on, younger ones take their place, but (the seniors) teach the younger ones (the job) before moving on."

Jim said he doesn't mind that the work he offers is transitional for the youth, adding that he and Doris want the youth to move on to other experiences after getting their experience with farm work.

For some of the youth, working for the Stutzmans has become a sort of pre-season football warmup.

In fact, some of the football playing students expanded the farm name to "Friendship Farms Training Camp," because of the physical labor involved.

Two different crews of high school football players working at two different sites to stack hay has resulted in some friendly competition of strength and endurance to see who finishes first.

According to Marty, who went to school with some of the help, the other incentive was that the faster the hay was stacked, the longer respite before the next wagon load came in from the field.

"The quicker they go it off (the wagon), the longer break they got," Marty said, grinning.

"They worked hard, and I think it got them ready for football," Jim said. "They also learned punctuality and reliability. It helped us and gave them some spending cash," he said.

According to Jim's calculations, in good years, if he got three cuttings of hay, the summer help would stack 20,000 bales.

However, the Stutzmans cut back on the number of acres they farm. They no longer lease 300 acres in addition to their own 500.



The Stutzman family stands in the lawn in front of their barn at Friendship Farms. From the left are Doris, Becky, Jim and Marty Stutzman.

While Jim said the leased land was sold to someone who farms it, Doris said she had a different notion about why the matter.

"Old age. It was old age," she said.

Doris held off-farm jobs before they had children, but has since focused on raising them and taking care of the household, in addition to helping around the farm.

"I get to do the dishes in the barn, too," she said, "and drive tractor if they are desperate." She said she dislikes any machine bigger than she.

Jim has been on sabbatical, which ends this fall. He's been to Missouri to visit and to eastern Pennsylvania for the National Science Teachers Convention.

The time off has helped greatly after losing Ernest, they said.

Even though on sabbatical, education continues to be important for the family.

Becky graduated from Frostburg State University on May 13 with a degree in health and physical education, and has been job hunting.

Marty completed his freshman year at Garrett Community College, in McHenry, Md., where he's pursuing a degree in agricultural management.

Jim has been taking classes too. Earning 12 credits through the Gannon University outreach classes, Jim said, "I found out I'd rather be the teacher than the teacher."

On the farm, Jim and Marty makes decisions together after discussion, but Jim said Marty manages the dairy.

The cows are fed a totally mixed ration, and test forages about every two weeks. Each month a veterinarian conducts a herd health check.

According to Jim, they haven't had a serious cow health problem for a long time, though he said that weather has been frustrating.

"It's been difficult weather to raise calves," he said. "The undulating temperatures ... is hard on calves."

They market their milk through the Maryland Virginia Cooperative.

Jim and Doris are involved with other activities also.

In February, Jim became president of the Pennsylvania Young Farmers Association, succeeding James Berry of Brookville. In the



Jim Stutzman is a school teacher and farmer. After milking, here he goes over material he may include in lesson plans.

association, the past president is an active member who assists the serving president.

"We try to share a lot of responsibility on the executive board to cut down expenses," Jim said.

They've been working to prepare for the next winter convention, set for February 1996, with Somerset County to serve as host. There are three YF chapters in the

county.

Stutzman also said he really believes in the organization because it is about learning. He said he would like to see more people involved, men and women. He said they would enjoy the conventions, the learning, the sharing of experiences and knowledge, and the conventions.

"(The convention) is like a class reunion," he said.



Jim Stutzman shows how he mixes corn silage and haylage, with silos built adjacently and emptying onto a conveyor.

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