

Farm Couple Heads National Council

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— Eric and Melissa Herr are a young, optimistic couple brimming with enthusiasm for the dairy industry.

Part of that enthusiasm is generated from their life long involvement in farming and part because they participate in the Young Cooperative (YC) Leadership Program, which is for dairy co-op members 18 to 41 years.

"The National Council opens a whole new window for us," Melissa said.

"It's neat to see how it's not only dairy farmers working for the future but also how the co-op and others work to develop new markets and value-added products," Eric said.

The Herrs recently returned from Nashville, Tenn., where they participated in a YC Leadership Program. It was the fourth trip in two years awarded to the couple who represent the Milk Marketing Inc. (MMI) Dairy Cooperative to which they belong.

In their second year representing MMI, the Herrs have been elected to serve as vice chair couple for the National Milk Producers Federation.

Now that they are elected to the national advisory council, the Herrs will be taking a few more trips including one to Anaheim, Calif. next December.

But the YC program is much more important than the trips the Herrs take in representing the industry.

The trips are working sessions for the Herrs and instill a positive outlook in the young couple for a future in farming.

The Herr's involvement in the program began when the field man for MMI asked them to help build the YC program in the area.

The Herrs helped plan the fall conference and select the speakers. Issues addressed during the program included management and profitability, the family farm, care of animals, manufacturing of dairy products, and becoming a price-maker.

In July, the Herrs will accompany the advisory council to Washington D.C. to meet the national milk lobbyist and congressmen.

"I'm not one to understand all the behind-the-scenes activities in the making of the farm bill and

milk pricing controls," Eric said. "It's an education to see how things work out. It gives us an opportunity to see what's going on. It's nice to know there are people working for you in Washington and on the state level. When we understand more, it helps ease our fears about the future."

The Herrs had been with Eastern Milk Producers, which then merged with Milk Marketing Inc., becoming the third largest cooperative in the U.S.

The transition was smooth, the Herrs said, because they maintained the same milk inspector and field director.

The Herrs are thrilled that MMI operates several plants to produce value-added products.

"It is exciting to learn that there are people employed full-time to research new products using dairy products. Recently they discovered a way to use whey powder (discarded in the cheese-making process) by selling it to pharmaceutical companies to use as a coating for pills. Until a few years ago, whey was basically worthless. Now it's become valuable," Eric said.

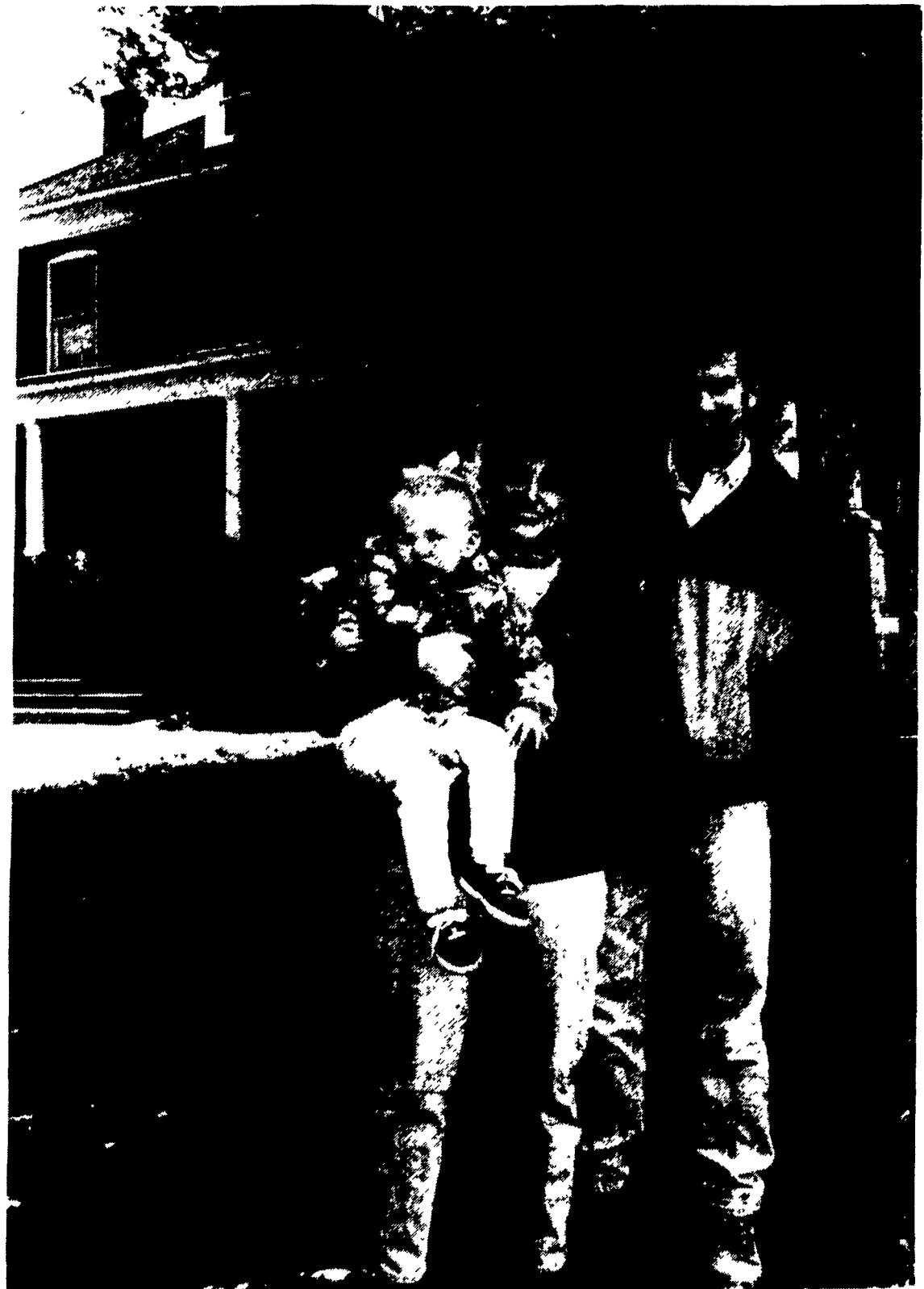
MMI is also researching ways to export to other countries.

"There is a surplus of dairy products here (U.S.) and the only way to keep milk prices strong is to export," Eric said.

"It's a long expensive process — they (MMI summit) explained all the details to us. It isn't just a simple thing to send our surplus to other countries because not every country uses butter or cheese like we do. It takes several years of learning what other countries want."

The Herrs live on what they call the second farm because it is the second farm that Eric's dad, Donald Herr, owns. The farm is along Rt. 222 South of Lancaster near Willow Street, across the fields from the home farm where Eric and his dad milk 55 cows. Most of the 130 acreage from the two farms are used for crops to feed the Herr's stock, but some is cash cropped, and 17 acres are raised in tobacco.

"My dad and I work shoulder to shoulder and share responsibility for the farm," Eric said. "Some guys would do anything to farm on their own, but not me. Farming for dad has its advantages. It wouldn't be possible to travel with YC if my dad wasn't home to pick up the



Remember the young couple who with their bridal party took off from the church in a farm wagon hitched to a tractor? The article and picture appeared in *Lancaster Farming* on July 20, 1991. Now that couple — Eric and Melissa Herr with daughter Janae — are as committed to farming as ever and are vice chairs of the National Young Cooperator Program.

slack."

"It's a great set up," Melissa said. "It's neat that Eric has such a good relationship with his father. They work so well together."

This quality is especially valued by Melissa whose own dad and

brothers work in partnership at Garber Farms in Mount Joy.

"Family — which means extended family — is of big importance to us," Melissa said.

Some older farmers frown upon traveling to meetings, but Eric said, "Dad encourages us to be involved with YC. He knows the value of learning will further the farm. And, I think that he wants to give us the opportunity he never had to get away and be refreshed."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Eric said, "I don't want to take advantage of my dad because he deserves more time off than I do since he's older. I try to be available whenever he has the opportunity to spend time off the farm."

Melissa said that the most valuable asset in being involved with MMI is meeting other people. "Most people even if they are from different areas, have the same problems and struggles. They may

say, I had the same problem two years ago and this is how I solved it.

Eric said, "There's lots of encouragement in that. We tend to think it's so bad here. Some farmers complain about this county having so much traffic and such high land prices but I think it sort of balances itself out when you look at the positives.

"We are so strong here with good vet and consulting services, markets, and the growing season that we often take it for granted," said Eric. "Living in Lancaster County, it's easy to forget that not everyone else does things like us."

The Herrs find it fascinating to hear about growing seasons in other areas and to compare the different land values and feed prices.

"I always said that I wanted to marry a farmer," Melissa said, "but I didn't know he was going to be a

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The Herrs say that 2-year-old Janae is a true farm girl. Here she helps Eric feed the 55 milking cows that he and his dad milk on the 130 acres they farm.

HOMESTEAD NOTES