

# Walkers Ready For Farm Show

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— The show box has been cleaned out and restocked. Their Walk-Le farm sign is ready to hang.

Feet are trimmed and some rough clipping done on their four Farm Show-bound Holsteins.

Probably, a few extra clothes and snacks will be packed along with all the other supplies this year — just in case it snows.

While Farm Show officials hope the weatherman forecasts a run of pleasant January weather, Michelle Walker, 14, figures she would not be upset if a repeat of last year's blizzard hit. She and her brother Brad, 20, were snowed in at the 1996 Farm Show, while their brother Greg, 18, and parents Brenda and Leroy battled to finish the chores and make it to the Holstein show after some two feet of drifting snow blanketed the region.

"It was fun," says Michelle, of the howling blizzard that marooned exhibitors inside the complex and kept would-be crowds snowed-in at home. "There were only a few people that came and it was like a big party among farmers that were there exhibiting animals."

"We piled everything in the stalls and Grandpa took the trailer home so he wouldn't have to shovel it out later," she recalls of the rush to exit the parking lot before the flakes began piling up.

Even being picked up, by friends, while in her sleeping bag and being dumped out into a snowdrift did not dampen the York County 4-H dairy exhibitor's enthusiasm to return this year and chance another round of the exceptionally bad weather that plagued the Farm Show's 1996 run.

The Walker family first showed at the Farm Show in the mid-1980s, when their children began raising 4-H project animals.

Leroy grew up on the Glen Rock dairy farm of his parents, Hazel and Norman Walker, and worked for several years in the area as a dairy herdsman. He and Brenda started their own milking herd in 1990 on a rented farm near New Freedom, then purchased their farm at Thomasville in 1994.

Exhibiting at the Farm Show has been a favorite family activity since entering their first heifer about 10 years ago. In fact, when the Walkers discussed a possible January visit to Disney World some time ago, Brad opposed the timing because it meant missing the Harrisburg event.

Four head are entered in the Walk-Le show string for this year's exhibit: Michelle's yearling, Greg's yearling and aged cow, and Brad's 5-year-old in the open class show.

Absent from the lineup after many years, however, will be Brad's junior show reserve grand champion from last year, Wams Sexy Lady.

Lady, an EX-2E-91 Sexation daughter and the undisputed "queen" of the Walker's herd until she was lost a month ago, freshened early in December with a bull calf, then died very unexpectedly from internal bleeding.

Efforts were made to salvage 13 eggs from her reproductive system, but none were found to be transferrable. She had been named supreme at the York Fair's junior show in 1993 and 1994, took first in the junior division of her class at the Holstein Association's 1996 spring and fall championship shows, was fourth in the junior division at the September Harrisburg All-American.

However, the family's pride and pet will be recognized posthumously, having just been named the Junior All-Pennsylvania winner in the 100,000-pound category by the state Holstein Association.

In four lactations, Lady made more than 125,000 pounds lifetime, including her last 391-day lactation of 39,000 pounds of milk.

Brad does have one heifer from Lady, an August-born embryo-transfer calf. He also plans to raise her two bull calves, the December-born natural calf and one August-born ET.

Brenda purchased for Leroy his first registered calf as a Christmas present about 10 years ago. Descendants of that calf are still part of the Walker's 105-head registered Holstein herd, which recently topped the York County DHIA production list for 1996.



The Walker family carries their farm sign to load on the truck in making final preparations for exhibiting at the Farm Show. In front are Leroy and Michelle, Brenda and Greg behind and Brad at the top of the steps.



Cleaning out and checking the necessities in the showbox is a must-do before the Walkers head for the Farm Show building in Harrisburg. Brad, Michelle and Greg take inventory of what they need to add to their supplies.

In October 1995, the Walkers switched to a 3X milking schedule, increasing their rolling herd average over 5,000 pounds and gaining an average production boost of 10 pounds per cow. Their November 1996 RHA was 25,440 milk, 924 fat and 815 protein.

The Walk-Le herd now averages about 80 pounds of milk per head per day, on a carefully-balanced TMR ration geared to a split grouping, one for top producers and one for heifers. Both feeding and health programs are monitored closely with the assistance of nutrition and veterinary consultants.

"Quality of forage and cow comfort," are two factors that Leroy pinpoints as key to their increased production.

Putting up quality forage this year was a challenge, with the season's prolonged periods of moisture, and feedstuffs are tested frequently.

Pillow mattresses in the free stalls, increased ventilation in the

barn and lining the feed bunk with a smooth, non-concrete surface have all enhanced overall cow health, comfort and feed intake.

Since his graduation from Susquehannock High School in June 1995, Brad is full-time herdsman. He milks the 3 and 11 p.m. shifts in the double-five parlor, handles freshenings and dryoffs, and selects the matings, while Leroy does the A.I. work in the herd. Brenda does the 7 a.m. milking, and Leroy fills in when needed on any shift.

Greg, a junior at York Vo-Tech studying welding, is kept busy as the farm's machinery and equipment "fix-er," as well as being responsible for evening and weekend feeding chores. He was recently recognized by his 4-H leaders for his activities in the program this season.

Michelle is an eighth-grade student at Spring Grove Middle School. She raises calves and waters the heifers, helps to switch