

Zahnbach Farms Prepares For Next Generation

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Sattazahn is 63 and works at the home farm, with Ray.

"My father started his sons all out in farming," Ray said. "When we started on, a fellow (with a farm coming up for sale) came and asked if any of the boys were interested in farming. We (Robert and Jane) were the only ones married," he said.

His father helped get them started dairying.

They started in Myerstown in 1954 with 24 cows and Delaval milkers (the kind that are set down along side the cow, not the kind that were suspended beneath the udder from an adjustable strap slung over the cow's back).

Like many others at the time, the couple lugged the buckets of milk to the cooler.

In 1955 or 1956 — he couldn't recall exactly — the electricity in Myerstown went off for a week and he had to borrow some different milkers and rig up a generator.

That experience led them to eventually find a dependable back-up electric power system. They went through several — including an Army surplus monster — before finding one at the state Farm Show.

After nine years in Myerstown area, they moved to the current farm — one Bob's father purchased and sold to Robert and Jane — in 1967.

The invested in building a modern operation that would provide the family with a future, as well as challenges.

They built new facilities. They had the herringbone parlor and 104-stall freestall barn and a 125-cow mostly registered Holstein herd.

For the time, it was much advanced technology.

The Sattazahns were among the first to use hutches, after seeing them at the state Farm Show.

In fact, Robert said he bought some other major items through Farm Show exhibits — three different Allis Chalmers/Deutz Allis tractors that had been displayed at the Farm Show, and a generator capable of running dependably off of a tractor (PTO) and providing enough juice to provide the electric needs for the entire farm and household, with everything turned on.

That's what Robert said they did when the salesman showed up with the model to provide a demonstration. They turned on all the electric to provide a full load test of the generator. It passed the muster.

The hills in the Host area of Berks County can get a little steep compared to relatively flat and rolling hills of the more central Lebanon Valley.

Robert said that when they were first at the farm, while some of them were working on a corn crib, his father told the others to go work on a certain field. "When we got to the hill, we didn't know what to do," Robert said, laughing. They stopped the tractor and looked at it.

While he and his brothers were very familiar driving tractor, they weren't familiar with significant slopes that can pose a challenge to keeping the center of gravity between the wheels.

The farm really is a small valley — the fields and woodlands are spread out from the farm house and barn and stream like a deal of cards held in a hand.

Fields are contoured and grass waterways prevent erosion. The flood plain of the stream is partially pastured, but mostly appears to

be managed for erosion control.

The farm is isolated, though the din of traffic from Rt. 419 filters its way up the valley.

With all the children out on their own, last year the Sattazahns stopped milking three times per day. But they had milked three times per day for 35 years, starting back when they were farming in Myerstown.

It is perhaps quieter now that their herd has been reduced and the children are out on their own.

Their youngest son Mark, 31, lives on his own and works for Agway, but still manages to go to his parents' farm to help with feeding and other work.

Their oldest child is their daughter Rebecca "Becky" Harakel, who is secretary at a company, but who with her husband operates a side business of custom-printing T-shirts. The couple is printing T-shirts to sell to members of the Pennsylvania State Grange, which is celebrating its 125th annual meeting this year.

In fact, Robert and Jane said that at a Pomona (a county meeting involving the 12 subordinate Granges in Berks County) meeting June 7 that featured a visit by state Grange Master Bill Steel, about 100 members wore their T-shirts in a show of support.

Their two other sons are involved in the dairy industry.

The oldest son Nick, 38, worked for a Jersey herd for 10 years, and now works for Mill-Joy Dairy Farm where he is mostly responsible for crops and his wife milks one time per day.

Another son, George, 36, and his wife Robin, work for LynnAcres.

Both of the dairy herds are about 250 animals, Robert said.

Most of the Sattazahns' children have started their own families. The grandchildren visit. A wooden children's play structure with seat swings, overhead rungs, climbing ladders, and a rope swing is in the front yard of the old, thick-walled stone farm house.

The trees behind and around the house are old and seem perfectly mated to the house.

This is the older Berks County agricultural area. It is a remnant of the Pennsylvania German era in a way — isolated, thick, green and lush. Like many other farmers in the area, Robert speaks Pennsylvania German.

Involved in the Grange locally, at the county level and at the state level for years, Robert is one of three members of the Pennsylvania State Grange Dairy Committee. He started serving on the committee when Charlie Wisner was state master. The members serve to collect and prepare dairy policy for the Grange.

He has also served on the state Good of the Order Committee.

He has served various offices, such as county master, overseer, treasurer, etc.

The list is long.

In 1969, Robert and Jane were the first Pennsylvania State Grange Young Couple of the Year. They got to go to Florida for five days to compete in the national contest. It was their one and only trip to Florida.

But through the Grange bus trips they have seen a good bit of the United States and some of Canada.

This year they are headed for Wisconsin.

Robert was a leader for the Stouchsburg 4-H Community and then Dairy Club.

He has honorary FFA chapter

and state degrees — three different chapters presented him with honorary degrees.

He has served as president of the Tulpehocken Young Farmers Association, actually helping to get it started.

Robert also recently received his 40-year membership pin from the Pennsylvania Holstein Association, served on the board of the Reading Fair, and president of the president of the Berks County Dairy Farmers Association, as well as a director on the Pa. State Grange Service Corporation, treasurer of the Southeast Pennsylvania District 4-H dairy show, and on the consistory of a nearby Trinity United Church of Christ, as well as being the current farmer representative on the state board to the Underground Storage Tank Indemnity Fund.

He is also involved with the county Pomona Consignment Sale Committee, which is scheduled to hold its 29th such sale starting 8:30 a.m., August 23 at the Leesport

Auction.

There's more.

But he said he has had to cut back on some of his involvement also, now that they are on their own.

Nevertheless, that hasn't diminished his interest in what lies ahead for the dairy farm family.

He said he thinks federal orders are good and necessary, though he looks forward to the consolidation; he said sometime in the future membership in the Northeast Dairy Compact could be beneficial for Pennsylvania; he is a strong supporter of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board; and he thinks that the nation's desire for cheap food won't allow the dairy farm family to become extinct.

He noted that while the dairy farm family may be a generational tradition, or may be started by a young couple with no previous family involvement, it offers cheaper food, because it offers cheaper labor, and labor is still

necessary to the production of food and fiber.

While a corporate setting may be able to produce things cheaper due to reduction of labor, it still has higher labor costs.

Like all families, the dairy farm family is perhaps supposed to have its own life cycle — times for beginnings and endings.

But Sattazahn still worries about what is to become of the farm, his and those of others.

"It scares me, for a young farmer to get started with the costs increasing and the milk prices dropping," he said.

"There's a farmer I know. He's still farming. He's older than I am. He made money in his day, we did too.

"But he says, "The pile keeps getting littler and littler."

"The 'pile' is his money," Robert explained.

"Basically, the only way (for young people to enter dairy farming) is with the help of their parents."

PFB Supports State Ag Nominations

CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — The Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) is urging prompt Senate confirmation of Governor Ridge's nominees for Secretary of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB). The governor has nominated Samuel Hayes Jr. of Warriors Mark, Huntingdon County to the Agriculture Secretary's post and Luke Brubaker of Mt. Joy, Lancaster County to serve on the three-member PMMB.

In a recent letter to Sen. Dan Delp, chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, PFB president Guy Donaldson said, "Mr. Hayes has a distinguished career, both as a legislator and as an advocate for agriculture." Hayes retired from the state House in 1992 after serving 22 years, including 16 years in leadership positions. "While in the General Assembly, (Hayes) shepherded numerous agricultural

legislative initiatives," Donaldson said, "and was instrumental in the adoption of Pennsylvania's farmland preservation program."

Hayes was the recipient of PFB's "Barn Raiser" award in 1992 in recognition of being a "tireless advocate for agriculture" during his years in the General Assembly. PFB has presented the award only seven times in its 46-year history.

"Mr. Hayes has strong qualifications for the position of Secretary of Agriculture," Donaldson wrote. "We are confident of his ability to lead the Department and to chart a positive course for the Commonwealth's number one industry in the future."

Luke Brubaker is the owner and operator of a 450-cow dairy farm in Lancaster County and is the manager of an 800-acre dairy agribusiness partnership. He has been nominated to a six-year term on the PMMB which regulates the dairy industry in Pennsylvania.

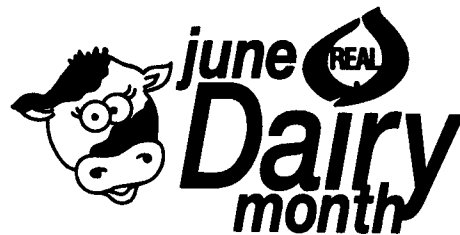
"Mr. Brubaker has proven himself to have substantial knowledge and understanding of the dairy industry and dairy marketing principles," Donaldson stated in a letter to Sen. Robert Mellow, the Senate Minority Leader. Brubaker is a member of the Mt. Joy Farmers Cooperative and received the Pennsylvania Dairy of Distinction award in 1995.

"(Brubaker) has also shown himself to be a capable leader both inside and outside of dairy circles," said Donaldson. "He currently serves as Chairman of the East Donegal Township Board of

Supervisors, Chairman of the Farm Service Agency county committee, and is chairman of PFB's Poultry Meat Advisory Committee . . . We strongly encourage your support for Mr. Brubaker and prompt confirmation by the Senate of Pennsylvania."

Both nominations have already been approved by the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. Confirmation for both will require two-thirds approval by the state Senate.

PFB is a voluntary, statewide organization representing 26,625 farm and rural families.



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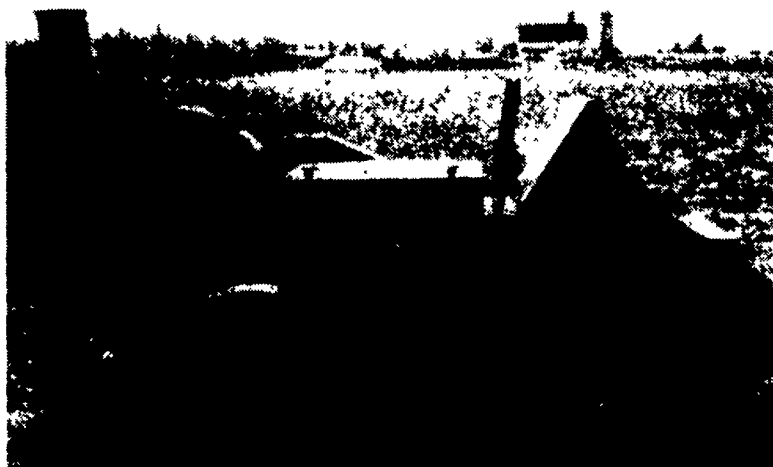
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