

# 'Pig Herder' Dog Helps Prepare Beams For Farm Show

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ELVERSON (Chester Co.) —

Max can be unruly sometimes. If you drop your pocketbook, he'll retrieve it and, most likely, run away.

Max can be unpredictable. The 9-month-old Labrador Retriever is the infamous "pig herder" on the swine farm owned by Bill and Robin Beam, Elverson. The yellow Lab can keep the Farm Show hogs in line while they're walked, or he can simply get in their face and make them bolt every-which-way.

Max can be downright cunning. "If we'd go duck hunting, he'd eat the ducks," said Bill's 12-year-old son, Matthew, who watches as the infamous "pig herder" works on the two York crossbreeds being walked in preparation for Farm Show.

Max has enemies, too. He can't stand cats, said Matthew's brother, Shawn, 9. "He'll go after them, and they'll scratch back," he said.

But Max is a lot of fun and great help to the Beam family.

He'll split the hogs on their walk in the middle. Max is "trying to think he's helping," said Bill Beam. "He thinks he's helping. He's just that way."

Have we forgotten something? Oh, they took Max fishing one day and he nabbed a bluegill.

"I don't know what it is about Max," said Bill. "Call it talent, but it's something."

Although the yellow Lab is "still a puppy, he's just a big puppy," Bill said, the family has taken him into their own. Even Dylan, at 3 years old and the youngest of the brothers, tries to play with him. "But Max just tackles him," said Matthew. "Max is just too big."

Max stays with Matthew and Shawn Beam, both of whom plan to make great strides at their first Farm Show.

Matthew, 12, is in the sixth grade at Conestoga Christian School in Morgantown. Brother Shawn, 9, is in the third grade at the school.

Their father, Bill, noted that Matthew placed at the annual Southeast 4-H Market Hog Derby held at the Lebanon Fairgrounds last summer. In August, both boys participated at the Chester County 4-H Roundup and Sale.

Bill noted that the "Lancaster and Lebanon guys offer tough competition," he said, so it will

take some time for his sons to learn how to show. Matthew and Shawn both do a lot of work on the farm, helping with feeding, bedding, and caring for the hogs.

Matthew helps feed the 40 head of beef cattle in the barn.

The farm is also home to some show hogs by Kirk Ewing, Owen J. Roberts FFA member. Ewing works on the farm cleaning pens, bedding, and feeding.

Matthew and Shawn Beam are taking two York/Hampshire crossbred hogs, with genetics obtained by their cousin Nelson Beam, Elverson, and uncle Brian Beam of Lebanon to the Farm Show.

Before that, however, the Chester County 4-H Swine Club members are getting a lot of work out of Max.

Their dog helps herd the hogs "if the weather is decent," according to Bill Beam.

They watch for good weather because one day it was icy. They took out some hogs for a show, and one hog got hurt when it slipped, pulling a muscle. Each day, weather permitting, the hogs are walked about a mile down the long, paved path to the farm.

They also walk them on the weekends "so they don't get fat," said Matthew.

Both don't have names for their hogs. They are simply referred to by a computer inventory tag number. "I think mine is number 196 or 194 or something," said Matthew.

They don't name them simply because, even though the boys sometimes get attached emotionally to their hogs, "they don't get real attached," said Bill Beam.

The hog show is scheduled in the Small Arena of the Farm Show Complex on Tuesday, Jan. 13, beginning at 8:30 a.m. Judge for the show is Dr. Lauren L. Christian, Ames, Iowa. Arrival time for pigs is Sunday, Jan. 11 between 4 p.m. and the next day, 10 a.m., Monday, Jan. 12. Market swine will be weighed in beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 12.

Bill noted that, with some of the almost a dozen hogs kept for show in the pen, some are the result of AI work being done by Brian Beam, his brother.

Matthew works on feeding and bedding the hogs. He also helps with the beef cattle, moving them to different pastures in the summertime.

Matthew, while he enjoys swine



Matthew Beam, front, works on feeding and bedding the hogs. He also helps with the beef cattle, moving them to different pastures in the summertime. Shawn, in back, helps his brother with bedding.

projects, wants to raise cattle for showing someday. "You can make a lot of money with them," he said.

Shawn helps load the hog self-feeder. Both help with bedding the hog pens.

Bill cares for about 1,100 acres of land near the 135-acre home farm in Elverson. Titus Beam, Bill's father, has been a long-time 4-H leader.

Bill used to maintain a swine finishing house, but opted out of the operation years ago because of the unpredictable prices.

Now, he cares for about 40 head of finishing beef, taking 25 cows to a grazing system that encompasses about 35 acres on the farm.

Bill remembers what it was like to show at the county fairs.

He took out a newspaper clipping from Sept. 6, 1972 — he was 12 years old, the same age as his son, Matthew.

The clipping was from The Herald of Honey Brook. He was showing hogs at the Chester-Delaware County 4-H Hog Show at the Vintage Sales Barn. Bill was pictured

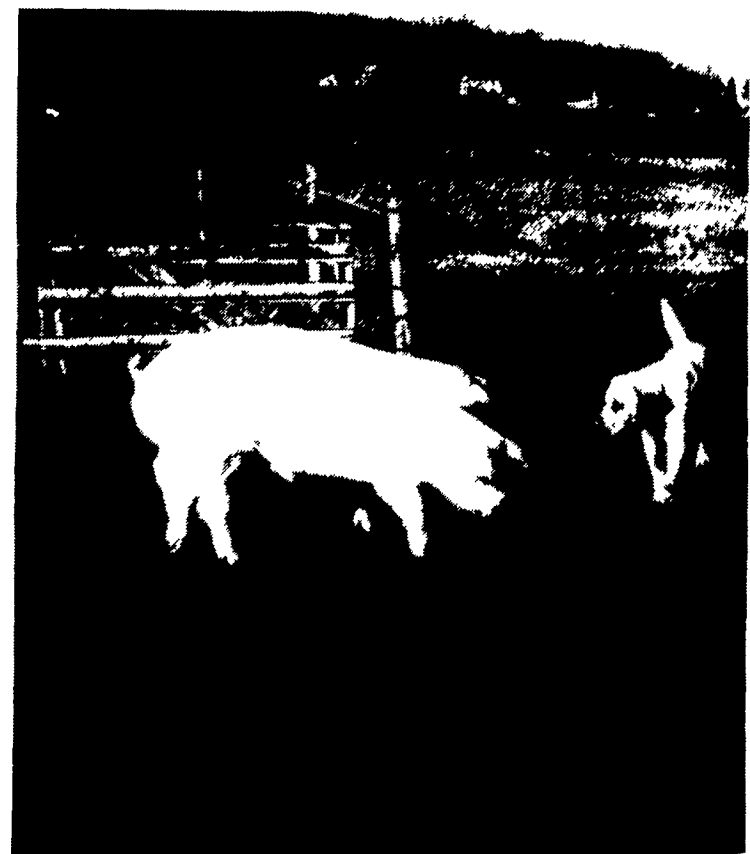
with Doug Beam, his brother, 11 years old at the time. In the photo, standing with them was David Kantner, Bucks County assistant agent.

By the way — Max, the Beam's all-purpose dog, wasn't in the picture.

But if you asked Matthew and Shawn, he'd sure like to be.



Max the "pig herder" in a contemplative moment.



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Shawn Beam, right, helps his brother Matthew load the hog self-feeder.