

New Master Farmers Named

William K. Jackson And Kerry Harvey

William K. Jackson and Kerry Harvey stand ready to grasp opportunity and adapt to what the market wants.

That willingness has led them to add value to their dairy product by manufacturing super-premium ice cream and opening a convenience store to draw customers to buy their milk and other products.

Jackson Farms, New Salem, Pa., is a three-way partnership between William S. Jackson (Master Farmer Class of '71), son William K. Jackson, and son-in-law Kerry Harvey. This business arrangement began in 1985, when they began making and marketing ice cream.

In 1986, they built a convenience store, including gas pumps. It lies along busy State Route 40 between Uniontown

and Washington in southwest Pennsylvania.

The elder Jackson oversees crop management. Bill a Penn State ag business graduate, manages the dairy herd, replacements and recordkeeping, Kerry, a former elementary school teacher, handles plant operations and wholesaling, Kerry's wife, Linda, also a former teacher, manages the store.

The farming operation consists of 790 owned acres, including 500 crop, 150 pasture and 50 woodland acres.

They milk about 170 registered Holsteins, averaging more than 20,000 pounds. Of their 3.3 million pounds produced annually, one-third is marketed through MidAmerica Dairy Cooperative, one-third is wholesaled to other stores, and one-third is sold in their store.

The partners employ one person full-time in the plant, two full-time people on the farm, three or four full-timers in the store, and about eight part-time in the store. Kerry's son Derek splits his time between the plant and farm. Store hours are 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

A name in ice cream. Kerry started manufacturing ice cream when he entered the business in 1985. He makes a super-premium (translation: high fat) brand to rival the taste of Ben & Kerry's.

"We live on our product," Kerry reasons. "If our product's not any good, we're not gonna have any customers."

Adapting to change. "This business expanded and grew because they adapted and were willing to change," Kerry notes

of the Jacksons.

He and Bill acknowledge the solid foundation set by William S. and his brother Robert, who were partners until 1985. This generation continues their tradition of low debt and reinvesting profits.

Capital improvement generally are paid out of operating expenses. They borrow very little money.

"Most changes we have made seem to result from opportunities that come along, sometimes unexpectedly," they note. "For instance, neighboring farms have come up for sale, and although we may not have planned to buy additional land, we couldn't pass on an opportunity."

The family recently built a 1,400-square-foot addition to the store. New kitchen and seating areas will allow them to expand their lunch business, which has been growing. "You have to serve the public what they want," Kerry says.

Any expansion will probably come at the retail or wholesale end of the business. That's a

possibility if any of their children decide to stay on the farm. They've talked about adding a restaurant or even a car wash.

Kerry and Linda have four sons: Jason, who attends college and works on the farm Derek, who works full-time on the farm; and Ryan and Joshua, both still in school. Bill and wife Janice, a speech therapist, have three daughters; Joni in college, and Jill and Jenna, both in high school. They also help out in the store.

Serving the community. The partners sport a long list of activities off the farm. Bill has been vice president and secretary of the Pennsylvania DHIA state board. He is president of the county fair board and has served as president of the county extension board. He won the state DHIA Clyde Robinson Award in 1996.

Kerry is a member of state DHIA, Holstein Association, MidAmerica Dairy Cooperative, Genex and Pennsylvania Milk Juggers Association.

Sam And Beverly Minor

Profitable dairying at Sam and Beverly Minor's Springhouse farm and market depends on their knack for niche marketing. With dairy margins shrinking, the Washington, Pa., couple emphasizes the food service, entertainment and vegetable segments of their business.

The Springhouse restaurant and market is open 361 days a year from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, except for opening at noon on Sundays. The operation consists of their own milk and dairy products, a bakery, fresh produce in season, deli, buffet-style restaurant and catering.

Special events, hosted every month are increasing important. They also do spring and fall educational tours for 3,000 to 4,000 school children. Their outdoor Picnic Patch has handled parties of up to 350. A dream for the future is a Banquet Barn.

The farm's two milking herds, totaling 110 cows average more than 19,000 pounds milk. One produces milk for the retail market; the second sells through National Farmers Union. Depending on what happens with Federal Orders and milk pricing, they will look into merging them.

They own 135 acres of cropland, 110 acres of pasture, 145 acres of woodland, plus the 14-acre homestead and retail market area.

Including family, Minors have 61 full- and part-time employees in the retail market and four employees on the farm. Keeping and motivating good, long-time employees has been a real asset.

Following a dream Beverly is a Penn State graduate in com-

mercial consumer services. Sam holds a Penn State ag economics degree.

In 1972, after 10 years in the artificial breeding industry, they decided to develop their own small farm and retail market in southwestern Pennsylvania, where both had grown up on farms. Beverly is a third-generation Master Farmer, following in the footsteps of her grandfather and father, Roy and Clyde Robison.

Sam cites critical advice garnered from one successful retail marketer. First, the man told him, location is everything. Second, he advised: "Turn your wife loose, and you look after the books."

In 1973, they bought the farm along Route 136 west of Eighty Four. Milking and retailing began in 1975.

Growth in food retail. With a more than 50% margin on food and only 27% margin in milk at that time, the choice to concentrate more on food became obvious. The bakery is the fastest-growing segment of their business.

A family effort. Sam and Beverly credit their children, now all married and ranging in age from 34 to 28, with helping make them successful. Their eldest, Marcia Opp, manages the store. The youngest, Sam, manages the farm operation, including 90 acres of intensively grazed pasture, 168 acres dedi-

cated to hay and hay balage, and 25 acres of market vegetables.

A third child, Jill Miles, returned home in 1995 to open The Springhouse Learning Station, a Christian-based preschool and day care center about five miles from the farm. Daughters Tee Kelly and Jody Englehardt live in Maryland and Virginia, respectively. But both maintain a strong interest in the farm.

Nephew Michael Lush oversees nutrition and breeding of both dairy herds.

Giving back. Minors say their relationships with extension and ag organizations were vital to getting them started. In gratitude, they feel compelled to now give back to the industry.

Long active with the state Dairy Princess Program and the Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Program board, Beverly now serves on the Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders Board and chairs the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board.

Sam is on Agway's Executive and Planning Committee, the Penn West Farm Credit board, and USDA's National Ag Research Extension Education and Economic Advisory Board; plus, he chairs the National Council on Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching.

They are also members of Grace United Methodist Church.

Keith And Helen Masser

Keith and Helen Masser of Sacramento, Pa., stress marketing and teamwork in their farming and potato distribution business. That teamwork extends to each other, fellow potato growers and customers.

Sterman Masser Inc., named for Keith's dad, started out in 1970 as a three-way sub-S corporation. Keith, Sterman and Keith's deceased younger brothers were partners.

Following the brother's drowning in 1980, Sterman turned to running a coal business. Keith, a Penn State ag engineering graduate, has been corporation president and general manager of the Schuylkill

County operation since.

Helen, who holds a Penn State degree in biological health and nutrition, is secretary/treasurer and accounting manager. She is a second-generation Master Farmer, following in the footsteps of father George Tallman of Tower City.

Today, Massers own 1,100 acres and rent another 1,500. Their "bread and butter" is 450 acres of potatoes, which yielded about 300 cwt. last season; they also grow grain. The corporation employs about 65 people, including eight managers.

Massers sell 1,500 trailer loads per year. Of those, they grow 300 themselves and 300

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ern Pittsburgh. Yet both find time to serve key ag leader roles.

Ronald Widmyer of Charles Town, W. Va. His enterprising nature and engineering skills replaced this Jefferson County farm's dairy enterprise with a productive aquaculture venture that markets fresh and value-added trout products. He's a strong advocate for streamlining regulatory controls on aquaculture.