

# Daview Farm Is Thriving Center For Cows, Promotion And Family

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KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.) —  
"If you need a social life, don't be a dairy princess," Erica Rae Davis said.

Her words might sound like a deterrent to prospective dairy princess candidates, but Erica is one of the most staunch defenders of the dairy princess program.

"What you put into it is what you get out of it. You're only giving up your social life for a year to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The rewards of the program go with you forever," Erica said.

After completing a year as the Berks County Dairy Princess, Erica knows the cost of wearing the crown and being a spokesperson for the industry.

A freshman at the Penn State Berks Campus, Erica took a lighter course load to accommodate dairy princess duties. She's taking summer classes to make up classes in hopes of transferring to Main Campus in January.

After achieving a degree in dairy and animal science and a minor in communications, Erica's ultimate goal is to work at the state or national level for the Holstein Association.

In the meantime, many of Erica's classmates know her as "Cow Lady."

The nickname didn't faze Erica, who took it as a compliment and used the publicity to tell classmates things about farming and dairy products of which they didn't know.

"Hardly anyone knew my real name," Erica said.

Go to one of the local fairs and you can almost always find the Davis family settled with their show cows near the end of the barn.

"We like it at the end because that is where most people like to stop and ask questions," Erica said.

She encourages visitors to take a turn at brushing a cow. She explains how cows need to have a calf before they can give milk.

The family, which includes parents Luther and Teresa, and siblings Gregory, 15; Aaron, 9; and Jillian, 5, have about 60 milking cows and 60 young stock — all registered Holsteins, 22 of which Erica owns. She received her first calf when she was four years old.



More of Erica's classmates know her as the "Cow Lady" than by her first name. Erica is proud of the nickname and uses every opportunity to educate the nonfarming community with farm life and dairy products.

The original calf grew to produce four heifers before birthing a bull. That established a sturdy foundation for Erica's growing herd.

Macy the cow is Erica's favorite bovine and is a 4-H project. Erica is both owner and breeder of the grand champion Holstein and won grand champion showman and reserve champion fitter with her. The 6-year-old is excellent in 1992-2E. The family also has an Astri bull proven in sire service. The 5-year-old bull is rated excellent '90.

"He likes to be a pet and gets quite jealous when we pay attention to the calves housed nearby," Erica said. The bull loves to be clipped.

The family lives on a 155-acre farm with 135 tillable acres put into corn and alfalfa. The Century Farm is owned by the Lester Miller family but the Davis family has lived on it for most of Erica's life and it is named Daview Farm. The herd belongs to the Davis family.

"We use only family labor so sometimes it's difficult to get everything done. But we want to stick to this size," Erica said. Most business decisions are decided by discussing it with the whole family.

"We believe in what we do. Our cows are our paycheck and we treat them with respect," Erica said.

The herd averages 24,200 pounds although a few have reached 30,000 pounds.

Erica admits that she and her dad are more prone to give cows a second chance than most other farmers might.

"Dad and I are really attached to the cows. Although we've seen lots of births, we experience the same feeling of wonder every time a calf is born," Erica said.

Growing up on the farm has taught Erica to accept the good with the bad, the sad times, and the happy ones.

"I grew up with the strong opinion that the dairy farm is a strong part of whom I am and always will be," she said.

Erica described herself as a former shy 8-year-old who was transformed into a communicator through involvement with 4-H, Junior Holstein, Dairy Bowl, and the Pennsylvania Dairy Princess Program.

"I was pushed by my mom—

and I don't mean that in a negative way—to participate and get involved in those organizations," Erica said.

She spent five years as a dairy ambassador before being selected as county dairy princess.

As a member of the Dairy Bowl, Erica said that she learned to handle stress and compose herself in public.

"Practice makes perfect," Erica said. "And poise and composure enhances communication."

Poise and composure came in handily when Erica appeared on the PBS television channel to prepare cheesy scalloped potatoes.

Erica had read how the channel wanted potato recipes for a special feature on the show. Erica sent in a recipe and a few facts about herself and was lucky to be one of the few contestants selected to prepare their entries on camera.

"I felt really at ease. And the exposure was great. The program was aired three times with an estimated audience of 50,000 people each time," Erica said.

During her reign, Erica tried to find nonfarm activities in which to promote the dairy industries. One of these was the Blood Bank, where in addition to donating blood, she handed out cheese, crackers, and dairy recipes to participants.

She also made 115 classroom appearances. In addition, the Davis family offers its farm for dairy tours.

"Kids are so impressionable. It teaches them good habits that hopefully will continue through life," she said of the importance of teaching kids about the importance of including dairy products in a healthy diet.

Erica said that teachers often asked questions and told her that they learned a lot through her presentation that they did not know about dairy products before.

Erica credits her mom for being creative and coming up with original ideas in teaching dairy promotion to both kids and adults.

Her mom said, "I watch the reactions of the children and build on it with other ideas."

In the classroom, Erica uses two balloons and says, "If we had no bones, we'd have no form at all. So stand tall and get the calcium you need, because if you don't, you will develop osteoporosis. Your bones will become so weak that even a sneeze can make a bone break." With that, Erica uses a pin to pop the balloon—a sound effect that leaves a lasting impression.

In classroom presentations, Erica plays "Mary Cowkins," a character that is a spinoff of Mary Poppins. Instead of Mary Poppins famous work, Mary Cowkins teaches children to say, "Superin-calciumfablisticexperalidelicious" through repetition. The word works great in catching kid's attention and helping them to attach the word to good-tasting dairy products.

After completing a school promotion, teachers often say to Erica, "You're going to study elementary education, right?"

Although Erica isn't planning on a career in education, she does enjoy participating in the America Reads program and tutors Head Start kids during summer months.

Teresa said that watching Erica fulfilling dairy princess duties has actually enhanced her own communication skills in dairy



Daview Farm in Kutztown is home for Luther and Teresa Davis and their children, Erica, former Berks County dairy princess; Gregory, 15; Aaron, 9; and Jillian, 5.

promotion.

"It has helped me become more fluent in talking to kids on their own level," Teresa said.

Mom is the one who often explains on-farm activities to the approximately 300 children who tour the farm annually.

She is also the official photographer, known to stop the tractor in the middle of a job in order to run for her camera.

Erica is amazed at the many adults who do not realize that calcium is available in low fat dairy products.

"I like milk out of the tank. I like it with lots of cream," Erica said. However, she finds the majority of females are concerned about fat, so she tells them that low-fat dairy products can give them all the calcium they need.

"Getting calcium from dairy products is more effective than taking a calcium pill, which gives you all the calcium at one time and much is lost because it is absorbed into the bloodstream.

"Besides, getting calcium from dairy products is a lot more fun. Top your vegetables with butter and cheese. Milkshakes give you a double dose of calcium because you have both milk and ice cream in it," Erica said.

She had lots of favorite promotions, but one of the most recent was the Maryland Women's Fest.

"We took 900 pictures of people with a milk moustache," she said. She divulged the secret that whipped cream is smeared on for a moustache since milk doesn't leave a vivid enough mark for pictures.

This summer, Erica is hosting in a restaurant, where the news has spread about her dairy princess title. It's another great advertisement that Erica uses to the advantage of the dairy industry by telling folks the truth about dairy products and farming.

When she is home, Erica is

responsible for feeding the baby calves morning and afternoon. She sprays the feet of the cows with a special mixture to reduce strawberry warts.

She also is her dad's relief milker—the only one he trusts.

He went 13 years without missing a milking. "I broke his streak by finishing milking before he got back from fieldwork," Erica said. Instead of expressing gratefulness that she finished the milking in 1½ hours instead of the normal 2 hours, her father was skeptical of her ability to do everything properly. "We'll see how many cows get mastitis," he mumbled.

The cows did not get mastitis, and Erica gained her father's approval as "the only relief milker I trust."

This year, with a bit of prodding from Erica and her mom, her dad will travel to the Dairy Expo.

"Mom and I went last year," Erica said of the event that amazed and challenged her. She borrowed a calf from an exhibitor so that she could participate in showmanship.

"It was exciting to show a top show animal, and I'm friends of the family ever since."

At Dairy Expo, Erica had two animals in the showcase featuring different daughters of sires, a Belwood daughter and a Astri daughter.

"It was exciting that so many people got to see animals from our farm," Erica said with obvious pride. Despite the long truck ride out and back and fitting and barn crew exposure, the cows came back without a scratch on them.

Luther's purpose in going to Dairy Expo is primarily to see the results of cow genetics firsthand in order to improve the breeding in their stock.

While cows are a prominent focus of the family, Teresa is quick to point out that the kids are the couple's main focus. When it com-

(Turn to Page B7)

HOMESTEAD NOTES

