

In the photo on the left, this new farm sign at the end of the lane along Chestnut Tree Road, along with fresh paint on the house, barn and out-buildings, and lots of landscaping care by Josie Gable, caps years of effort to transform the farm into a modern Dairy of Distinction. In the right photo, the tightly woven Charles and Don Gable families, and the father/son dairy operation, has been recognized nationally as an outstanding Ayrshire breeding operation, and more locally as a Dairy of Distinction. From the left

are Josie and Charles Gable, Don's wife Pam holding son Kevin, while their other sons, Joshua and Tyler, stand in front, and Don Gable holds the halter of one of the strong brood cows of the herd — Conebella Rewards Trudy, a 4-year-old 87-point with more than 29,000 pounds milk that has drawn interest from Canadian breeders in getting a bull from her for breeding purposes.

Conebella Farm Is Constructive Dairy Of Distinction

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MORGANTOWN (Chester Co.) — Among members of the National Ayrshire Association, the Ayrshire herd of 70 or more cows with the top average production per cow is at Conebella Farm, owned and operated by the Don Gable family, south of Morgantown, in Chester County.

In fact, out of 229 cows recognized by the national breed organization, 35 were bred and owned by Conebella. One other was bred by Conebella, but is owned by someone else.

That means that, out of all the Ayrshires owned by association members across the United States, almost 11 percent of those recognized by the association were bred and owned by the Gables.

Based on energy corrected milk (ECM) calculations, the Conebella herd is the top herd with greater than 70 cows for production. The Gable family also earned an Ayrshire Association's French Trophy, which is presented to the top herds, according to number of animals and herd average production.

The announcement of the achievements was made recently during the National Ayrshire Association's annual convention, held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

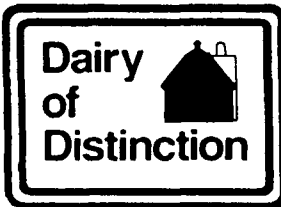
The actual average production on 73 milking cows was 21,671 pounds of milk and 803 pounds of fat, with 95 percent of the herd owner bred. The ECM production was 22,687 pounds milk.

Second place was the Delaware Valley College herd with 10 cows and actual production of 20,506 pounds of milk, with 80 percent owner bred.

(Third place was James and Joan Mueller of Cuba City, Wisconsin.)

The farm was also recognized for 40 consecutive years winning the association's "constructive breeder award," analogous to the Holstein Association's progressive breeder award.

The farm is also a 1998 Dairy of



Distinction. That means something to the Gables.

"A well kept, well maintained farm makes a nice impression and a nice place to work," Don said. "That's the hope."

The farm is run by Don Gable and wife Pam, who have three boys — Joshua, 7, Tyler, 5, and Kevin, 10 months. While the farm is in transition to Don and Pam, Don's parents Charles and Josie are integral to the operation, and live in a house close to, but out of earshot of, the main farmhouse, where Don, Pam and the boys reside.

Don is the fourth generation Gable to live on the farm. He took over the business in 1996.

The farm probably could have been accepted into the Dairy of Distinction program for years, though fresh paint and some other fixing up to prepare for a national Ayrshire tour last year provided the impetus to add finishing touches, such as a new full color farm sign, at the end of their lane.

The family also prepared a brief history of the farm for the tour, which saw about 250 people in two groups visit.

Located in Chester County's West Nantmeal Township ("nantmeal" is the Welsh word for "sweet water") with the Welsh Mountain ridge as the backdrop to the farm, the slightly rolling area is fairly rich in history.

The farm is southeast of the town of Morgantown, actually closer to Elverson, and the area is where three counties meet — Chester, Berks and Lancaster.

It has been a long time dairying area, though just last year a farm adjacent to the Conebella Farm was developed and 36 new homes

now loom over the corn fields on part of the horizon view from the farm house.

It's easy to see why residential demand is there. The pastoral scenery, a couple of area gentleman horse farms, and renovated old stone homes exude a sense of well-off families and a quieter pace.

Brownstone fence walls and older trees are common in the area, and, according to Charles, when he was young there were many stone fence lines dividing the farm into smaller pastures. Many of the stone fences were removed or buried, but there is a remaining one along West Chestnut Road that fronts the farm.

The farm name was derived from the names of two railroads that crossed on opposite side of the farm — the Conestoga and the Isabella. Hence, the condensed name reflects the railroads.

During the late 1930s, Charles' father C. Harold Gable purchased some Ayrshire heifers from Dunwoody Home Farms. Those heifers had Penshurst breeding. At that time, Dunwoody Farms was managed by Charles' late brother John. The present herd is descended from those heifers.

There are 198 acres that are planted in corn and alfalfa, and everything goes to feed the cows.

The bank barn is tie-stalls and that's where the milking is done. Every day or two the cows are let out on fresh pasture, a practice that has made a resurgence in recent years with United State university research into New Zealand dairying practices, and with high technology production techniques requiring equally high costs of production.

Don uses a totally mixed ration, and injectable bovine somatotropin to stimulate milk production in some of the cows, but they really don't push hard.

Charles said that grazing has been practiced on the farm for as long as he can remember, though now it is considered a supplement to the ensiled forages and mixed ration.

A semi-Virginia-style heifer barn was built in the 1970s by Charles. It sits behind the bank barn and Charles said that when he finished building it, an uncle of his who was the dairy expert in the family at the time came to see it and told him the heifers would all die from exposure.

His uncle died a couple years later and when his aunt came to the farm she asked if he didn't get the money yet to finish the heifer barn.

Now, Charles said, experts come to the farm and say he needs to removed more of the walls, to open it up even more.

The old railroad bed is buried, but raised and can be seen among the trees at the far end of the front pastures. In the front pasture is a two-acre pond.

Charles explained that the low lying area had at one time been wetland and, though it probably wouldn't be allowed now, it was converted into two additional acres of dry pasture and the two-acre pond.

He said, "Isn't it funny how today we have to save wetlands, but farmland is being destroyed (at a rapid pace)?"

The Conebella farmhouse is stone covered with stucco and the yard has several large nut/shade trees, and a shade maple.

Charles has a picture of himself as a young boy standing next the

recently planted English walnut in the front yard. The tree trunk is at least a yard in girth.

Chestnut Tree Road is tree-line and the farm lane divides the road frontage property between pasture and cornfield.

A couple of large trees at the lane end and a flower bed in front of the sign create a balanced scene and help frame the view.

An older spring house is located away from the main farm and barns and silos and machine and storage sheds, and all the buildings are painted primarily white.

The farm has some woodland strips and a semi-concealed pasture in the back acres. Dry cows and heifers use the pasture.

Charles helps with milking and field work and Josie is the landscape maintenance person. She cuts the lawns, the edging of the lane, and trims weeds along the roadfront stone wall, as well as tending to flower beds.

While the farm depends on the sale of milk, it also seeks to market breeding stock, and it has been recommended that a well maintained operation not only helps convey the perception of quality milk production and safety to the general public, but can help with marketing stock.

If nothing else, after the last milking of the day is done, relaxing on a freshly painted farm-porch in the shade of large trees planted by an older generation of family members, with a herd of brown and white Ayrshires in a lush-colored pasture, and reflections of the horizon dancing on the surface of a pond, and gentle summer breezes tinged with the musk of cattle and sweetness of flowers, being a Dairy of Distinction can just mean living better.

