

Elizabeth Smith Wins National Brown Swiss Ambassadorship

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
DENVER (Lancaster Co.) — Elizabeth Smith has traded in her county dairy princess crown for the national ambassadorship of the Brown Swiss Association.

"I enjoy talking and promoting something I love. I always want to promote the dairy industry, especially Brown Swiss," Smith said as she related the events leading up to her selection at the National Brown Swiss Convention held in Kansas recently.

Smith can talk for hours, her voice filled with passion and excitement, about the breed that she considers the best of the best. "Although I'm for all breeds, I've always been a Brown Swiss fan," said Smith. She helps on her parents', Dale and Thomas Smiths', 91-acre Reinhold's farm, where they have 55 milking cows, fairly evenly divided between Brown Swiss and Holsteins.

"As dairy princess I technically wasn't suppose to express a bias, but underneath I've always been partial to Brown Swiss—they have wonderful personalities and are so beautiful. I'm thrilled to be an ambassador for the association," Smith said.

At the national convention, Smith was one of five finalists selected from 17 applicants to compete for the national ambassador title. The other finalists were Nichole Lee Boggs of Andover,

Ohio; Clifford Helkenn of Northfield, Minn.; Ann Marie Magnochi of Carnation, Wash. and Venessa Johnson of Blue Eye, Mo.

"Ambassadors are selected much the same way that dairy princesses are," Smith said. Selection is based on application, interview with judges, and presenting both a prepared and impromptu speech.

The ambassador title replaces the former Brown Swiss Miss contest. The title change was made about three years ago to enable both male and female applicants.

Many people might expect someone so passionate about cows to be studying dairy science or a related field, but Smith is studying communications at the Penn State Harrisburg Campus. Her goal is to be a spokesperson for the dairy industry.

"I really want to go into milk marketing. The public has mostly wrong perceptions about the dairy industry. It's harder and harder to get people in high places such as the government to sanction farming. I want to affect how people perceive the dairy farming industry," Smith said.

"Brown Swiss are the breed of the future," Smith said. "They have high protein milk and are adaptable to varying climates and terrains."

"On our farm, we are replacing more and more Holsteins with Brown Swiss. They live longer than Holsteins and have less prob-

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Gordon Hoover is the fourth generation to farm the family farm. Although they farm 188 acres, milk 100 Holsteins, and raise replacements, Hoover, his wife Carole, and daughters, Jill, Brenda, and Leslie strive to keep things simple so that they have time for church, community, and agriculture activities.

Life With The Hoovers Rich In Family Relationships, Dairy Farming Success

LOU ANN GOOD
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GAP (Lancaster Co.) — "Keep things simple," is the strategy Gordon Hoover gives for being able to farm 188 acres, milk 100 cows, take family vacations, and volunteer time in church, farm, and community organizations.

The picturesque farm, home for Hoover, his wife Carole, and daughters Jill, 15; Brenda, 11; and Leslie, 7; is successful from continual study and foresight put into its operation.

"Maintaining a profitable operation is a key to any business success," said Hoover, whose philosophy is that a farm must be run like a business and not like a way of life.

To best fit their lifestyle and goals, the Hoovers run a streamlined operation.

"We don't invest in a lot of equipment. Machinery is a poor investment. Using custom harvesting allows things to progress in a more timely matter," Hoover said.

They store feed in trenches, which allows them to fill trenches faster and maintain quality.

With 100 cows to milk plus raising replacements, the Hoovers are well aware of where they need to focus their efforts.

"Cows pay the bills. We concentrate on herd health and feed efficiency," Hoover said.

Hoover is the fourth generation to farm what is really two adjoining farms. His parents live on one and continue to feed young stock. The younger Hoovers own all the stock and equipment but the farm is still in his dad's name. They are working through the process of a farm transfer. Like many father-son transfers, the Hoovers are finding this a mind-boggling process.

In recent years, three adjoining farms were sold, which Hoover

would have liked to have added to the home farm, but, he said, "Business sense must always prevail over desires when it comes to investing money in equipment, land, and cattle. The farms sold from \$7,000 to \$10,000 an acre. At those prices, you can buy a lot of feed. With high land values, you can't generate enough money through agriculture to make the returns profitable."

In today's market, Hoover said that crops can be purchased cheaper than growing them. The only viable reason that he sees for farmers to rent additional land would be to get rid of manure.

The Hoovers' nutrient management plan allows for expansion, but Hoover said that right now they are comfortable with milking 100 Holsteins and raising young stock.

Although updated and maintained, the Hoovers' milking facilities are 41 years old. They have loose housing and use a double four milking parlor.

"I anticipate that we will eventually expand because the facilities won't last," Hoover said.

Expansion would require an increase in herd size to maintain cash flow. While herd averages are 22,000 pounds, Hoover said that it doesn't matter what the averages are, the important thing is income over feed costs.

"One can make as much money milking 50 as well as 500 head, but the operation results in a different perspective. If you're milking 50 head, you're working seven days a week and long hours. If you're milking 500 head, you're working at a computer and managing employees. You don't end up with more money, but you do make life a bit easier," he said.

Just writing things down really helps keep control of the herd and

crops. "You can't do everything in your head," he said.

While many farmers complain of government intervention and environmental policies, Hoover believes environmental policies are realistically overdue.

He said, "Agriculture has been shielded from a lot of regulations environmentally and from OSHA. If we want to farm into the future, we must make up our mind now to adopt and subscribe to safe practices voluntarily or they will be mandated."

Hoover and Carole believe it is especially valid for OSHA to become involved in farm safety.

"Nothing makes me cringe more than to see a child riding on a tractor," Hoover said.

In addition, he sees too many children helping with farm chores that puts them into accident-prone situations. He said, "We (farmers) can instill the work ethic in children without putting them at risk."

Carole worked in a local hospital for a number of years and saw too many results of children hurt in farm accidents. She said, "I'm leary of children operating equipment."

Hoover understands that to continue, farming must be approached from the business perspective.

"These are rapidly changing times—just because you have a farm doesn't guaranteed you can farm the rest of your life," he said.

"We live in an information age. There is a wealth of information out there. We can't be afraid to ask. My father was a great person to teach me the value of using extension research. It's a learning process to know how to use all the information we receive."

Hoover said that the biggest gain he had from studying dairy production at college was to learn

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National Brown Swiss Ambassador Elizabeth Smith shows off a hand-painted picture of her favorite breed. "I'm thrilled to be an ambassador for the association," said Smith, who was a former Lancaster County Dairy Princess.