

Peachey Family Finds Contentment in Farming



Melvin and Judy Peachey of Belleville stand with their children, Tonya, Colton, and Michael, beside one of Judy's favorite hobbies - flower gardening. The children are the fifth generation to live on this farm.

GAIL STROCK

Mifflin Co. Correspondent
BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.) — Life is good on the Melvin and Judy Peachey dairy farm in the heart of Big Valley, Mifflin County.

Production is consistently one of the highest in the county. The kids are healthy. The

farm well cared for. Maybe that's why the farm is located on Tranquil Lane.

"We give the Lord credit," said Judy. "He's blessed us and provided everything for us."

Melvin's chance to farm on his home farm began four generations earlier. His great-grandfather purchased the

farm, and then Melvin's grandfather started farming in 1926.

Melvin's father, Rufus Peachey, helps to plant the farm's 60 acres of corn and 40 acres of alfalfa while Melvin enjoys concentrating on the cows.

Melvin and Judy milk 54 Holsteins (20 percent registered) three times a day.

"We have 50 stanchions now. I'd like to add 20 to 25 stalls in the next few years. We like our tie stall. I never want to milk more than 75 cows," Melvin said.

The tie-stall arrangement enables Melvin to have TMR feed in front of the cows at all times. One group TMR has greatly added to herd health and production, especially late lactation cows, with Melvin having recently dried off several cows milking 100+ pounds in good body condition.

This greatly helps production, although he'd like to install a stationary TMR mixer in the future. Melvin mixes half corn silage and half hay-lege (21 pounds) with high-moisture corn and protein. He credits Russ Kline, a nutritionist with Agri-Basics, for his herd's quality feed program.

"He's a good person to work with," Melvin said. "He pays attention to details."

"We put mattresses in a year and a half ago," Melvin continued, "and started bedding the cows with shavings. These have really added to cow comfort."

The idea to milk three times a day simply cropped up one afternoon three years ago while Melvin and Judy were milking. They went back out to milk that same evening at 11:00 p.m. and haven't regretted it. They now milk at 5:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 9:00 p.m.

"It's been easier on the cows. They were leaking and full," Melvin said. "Our 2-year-olds milk a lot more without wear on their udders. It has helped our herd health.

We were on everyday pick-up. Now, with a 2,000-gallon tank, they come every other day. We picked up 3,000 pounds milking three times a day."

"It's nicer for the kids, too," Judy added. "We're in the house when they go to school and when they come home. One of us waits until they're all asleep at night (11:00 p.m.) before going out to help milk."

Judy milks both mornings and afternoons and keeps the books. She loves gardening, flowers, and baking.

Their oldest son, Michael, 10, bottle-feeds the calves until they're five weeks old. He's also a member of the Mifflin County 4-H Dairy Club. Tonya, 8, and Colton, 5, enjoy doing all the things that younger children love to do on a farm - plus a little housework. Melvin loves to read. He'd like to fill the barn with purebreds someday too.

"If you're just selling milk, it's not worth it. If you're selling cows as a hobby, purebreds are worth it," said Melvin.

Melvin admits that buying into a family farm is much easier than starting farming from scratch. His goals now are to buy the farm, debt free, and stay up to date with the equipment.

"A farm is a great place to raise children," Judy said. "It's nice working together here at home. There are days we get tired and have bad days like everyone else, but we still like it."

"We're paying the bills and making a living besides," added Melvin.

What more could anyone ask for on Tranquil Lane.

*Dairy Trends In
 Pennsylvania's Top
 Producing Counties.*
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LANCASTER

Glenn Shirk

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The dairy industry in Lancaster County is undergoing a major transition, characterized by a more free market economy, mergers, alliances, expansions, niche marketing, specialization, more contractual agreements, and a rapid adoption of new technologies.

Agri-businesses are seeing who they can merge with or team up with to secure their share of the market, to become more efficient and to improve customer's service.

A similar move is taking place at the farm level. Many farms are expanding herd size in an effort to spread some of their fixed capital costs over more cows to enable them to purchase in bulk and negotiate better prices, to improve labor efficiency and increase milk output per worker.

Some are trying to reduce marketing costs and improve milk prices by producing enough milk to fill a tanker truck every 1-2 days. Being larger, they can hire and train teams of employees to become experts at performing crucial and specific tasks.

Smaller, more traditional farms, in the 40-100 cow size and operated primarily with family help, are finding it more and more difficult to compete with the well-managed, large dairy operations; it's hard for them to be experts in cropping, in herd health and nutrition, in breeding and reproduction, in milking systems and milk quality, in marketing, and in financial and business management.

Many of them are meeting this challenge by specializing in managing the milking cows and arranging for someone else to raise the heifers, harvest the crops and haul the manure. Many are relying upon the advice of expert consultants to help them make the right management decisions.

As an alternative to expansion, some producers are trying to improve cash flow by adding more value to the milk they produce. Some producers are getting more involved in processing their own milk, either individually or in conjunction with other producers, and servicing organic and other niche markets or by selling products directly to consumers

Lancaster Dairy Industry In Transition

others become part-time farms and rely on some non-farm income. Many choose to reduce costs by relying heavily upon intensive grazing.

In recent years, milk output per cow has increased tremendously due in large part to: improved genetics, better nutrition, higher quality and more digestible forages, improved herd health and feeding practices and more emphasis on cow comfort

Dairying can be a good "way of life" and a good place to raise a family, but to attain these benefits it must first be a profitable business. The economic pressures and competition that exists today is putting severe stress on many farm families.

Dairy farmers are to be commended for their optimism, their determination, and their willingness to make necessary changes to improve the viability of their business and enhance the quality of life, while also working hard to protect the environment and produce a quality food for all to enjoy.



Melvin and Judy prefer milking in their tie-stall barn. They'd like to add 25 stalls in the future and increase their herd to 75 cows.

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