

Good Attitude Critical In Making Dairy Profitable

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TROY (Bradford Co.) - On Lottahill Farm, nestled in the Endless Mountains of Bradford County, the Beardslee family is ready to take on the challenges of the future. In fact, they are in the process of studying ways to ensure that their dairy survives well into this Century.

Currently, Roy and Barbara operate the family farm in partnership with their son and daughter-in-law, Tim and Cathy.

The farm has been in the family since the mid 1800s and was originally settled by Roy's great grandfather. Roy took over the operation in the 1960s, when his father phased out of the operation, and Tim officially became a partner in 1978. Now the two families own a total of 800 acres with 500 acres of tillable ground. Much of their tillable acreage is rented from others.

Their total Holstein herd numbers 340 head with 184 milking animals. The herd, with a average milk production

of 19,500 pounds, consists mostly of registered animals. Tim maintains a balanced breeding program with emphasis on udders and feet

"I don't mind using high milk bulls as long as they have the type I want," said Tim. "I don't use a lot of minus bulls on fat and protein. I just try to stay balanced."

Although the Beardslees are only in the early stages of expansion planning, they have already spent a considerable amount of time pushing a pencil to see how things would turn out.

"We're either going to have to do a major remodel here or we're going to have to expand. We're way over capacity right now," said Roy.

About two years ago the Beardslees met with a consultant to explore possible roads for the future, but decided against expansion at that time.

"It looked like too big of a project for just Tim and I," said Roy.

Now they are again working with a consultant and they've



Tim, Cathy, Barbara and Roy Beardslee say that the bottom line in milk production is pounds of milk, fat and protein from the tank. Currently the Beardslees are considering expanding their dairy operation from 184 milking animals to 400.

enlisted a neighbor who is also thinking about making a change. Partial funding for the consultant's fee was obtained through a program run by the Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders.

"It's going to be good for both of us whether we do it or whether one of us does it, or whether neither one of us does it. It's a good process to go through," said Roy.

With the consultant, they evaluate different scenarios and then examine the cash flow and the other specifics like labor, feed needs and nutrient management requirements.

"We've gone through 300 cows and we changed the method a little bit and went to 350 milking cows and now we're at 450 milking. It's sort of fitting the operation to make the cash flow," explained Roy.

The Beardslees are also aware of pending environmental regulations that they want to meet, especially since they are located so close to a state park.

"We have been to a farm in Chambersburg which has about 300 cows. He composts

his solids and pumps the liquid. He can handle the liquid on about 40 acres right now and meets all of his nutrient management plan requirements, and he's right in the middle of Chambersburg where odor is a big concern for him. We're looking at that as a model."

Change is not new to the family. Even though the farm has always been a dairy operation, the numbers of cows has increased over the years, as has the setup of the operation. In 1978, the milking barn was consumed by fire, forcing them to build a new structure. They were, however, able to save all of the animals.

"Right after the fire, we moved our cows to a neighbor's farm and we built back. As we look back at it, we would have sold the cows immediately and focused on building," said Roy.

They reason that if they hadn't been distracted by the day-to-day care of the cows, they would have spent more time looking at other operations before building their present double six herringbone parlor and freestall barn.

"We lost a lot of money in production and we couldn't properly care for the cows, even though everyone involv-

ed did the best they could," said Roy.

"As we look back on it, we probably could have done a better job of building if we had sold our cows and focused on that. We may have not built there, we may have built someplace else. That's just something that if somebody had a fire now, they ought to consider, because it takes a lot of time to build."

The fire was in August and the Beardslees were back in the new barn in December.

The Beardslee Family also weathered two milk company bankruptcies over the years. They are now members of the North Penn Bulk Producers Association and sell their milk to Parmalat.

"It's never easy," said Roy. "But you go through it and you survive."

Although the Beardslees are looking at increasing numbers, they are quick to point out that expansion isn't for everyone.

"If you're standing still, you're going backwards, but there are a lot of ways to expand, it doesn't have to be physical in size," Beardslee noted.

"You can put on more cows, you can change practices. You make changes to improve the

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When he's not in the fields, Roy Beardslee spends time in his office which is carved out of a corner of the garage. Here he can manage the day-to-day operations of the farm.

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