

# Fayette County Master Farmer In For Life

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**BROWNSVILLE** (Fayette Co.) — No, Robert Jackson, Fayette County farmer is not in prison for life. He has just never seriously considered an occupation other than farming.

Jackson, one of four Pennsylvania farm operators named master farmers for 2000, runs the 450 acre Double J farm just south of Brownsville. Jackson, three other Pennsylvania and one Maryland farm operators were recognized in a ceremony held March 6 in Harrisburg.

Although he has not seriously considered any other career, Robert Jackson feels the weather and fluctuating milk prices have been two huge challenges in his life. The record highs and lows are tough, whether it's the weather or milk prices.

Located in hilly country between Pittsburgh and Uniontown, the 125-cow dairy is at the heart of the Jackson farm. Robert (Bob) recalls some of the transitions at the farm's beginning.

After earning an associate's degree in agricultural business from Penn State in 1975, Jackson joined a partnership with his father, Robert, and uncle, Bill.

In 1979, they purchased more land, converting the old Stuart beef farm to a dairy.

In 1985, the families split

the business, with the uncle's side keeping the land nearer Route 40, and Bob's family taking the Stuart place. The other Jackson's farm now includes a retail outlet on the old National Road (US Route 40).

When his father retired in 1988, Jackson took over the Double J Farm. The current farm includes 335 acres of cropland, 75 rental acres, and a 125-cow Holstein herd. The herd's average yearly milk production is about 23,000 pounds.

To increase feed efficiency, Jackson splits his milking cows into high-producer and low-producer groups, feeding the high producers extra rations to maintain peak production.

About 18 of the lower producers — which are usually toward the end of their lactations — are separated as a way to keep them away from the extra feed and extra weight that comes with it. Jackson and his wife, Joy, work closely with the DHIA to keep production records, tracking cow output through monthly measurements.

Bob also handles the herd's artificial insemination breeding program, noting that the main advantage for the herd is that he "can get her bred soon enough after coming into heat." He's achieved about a 50% first service conception rate.

According to Jackson, AI

gives him access to more bull studs. He works at a 13-month calving interval and may keep an unbred cow as long as a year before culling, depending on her production.

Also a consideration in breeding are marketing factors. Milk is sold through the milk cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America, where he serves as an alternate delegate. The cooperative gives a premium on fall production to counter the natural spring flush in April and May, when pasture — and milk — production peak. Bob's aim for fall freshening, however, has had limited success.

All heifer calves are kept for possible herd replacements. They are fed via the bottle for the first 6-8 weeks and weaned by the time they are 3 months old. The 4-6 month olds grow in their own pen, and are moved on to the breeding area by 15 months.

Bob aims for first freshening at 2 years. The cows are milked twice a day in the original double-six "super stall" parlor built in when the dairy was formed in 1979.

When not on pasture, the cows lounge in a freestall facility featuring a stall for every cow. Bob limits the herd size at this point to the number of stalls in the barn.

Although he may change the milkers in the near future, Bob figures he can use the milking parlor for another 10 years.

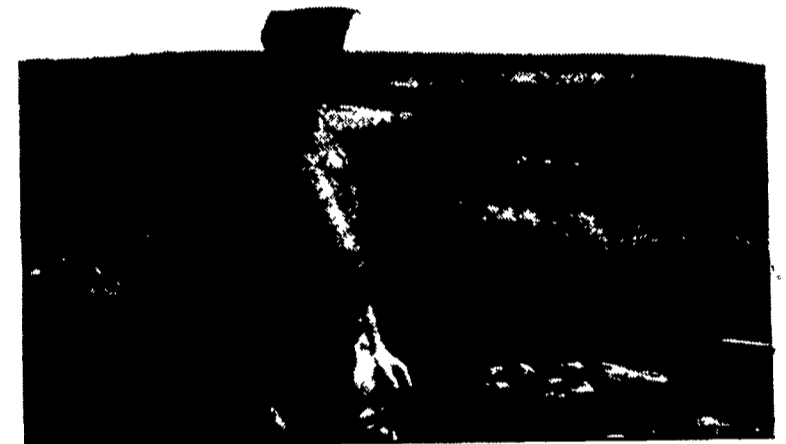
To run the farm, Bob has hired 3 full-time employees and a part-timer in addition to his retired father, who helps out as needed and as he feels able.

The Jackson family includes Bob, Joy, and four children: Andrea, 16; Amber, 11; Adam, 6; and Aaron, 4.

The couple served as regional leaders to the Pennsylvania Council of Cooperatives' Young Leader Conference in 1993. Jackson served as president of the Fayette County Holstein Association from



Outside his home in Brownsville, Master Farmer Robert Jackson stands with a lawn decoration given to him by a friend.



In the hill country of the Mon River Valley, Jackson uses strip farming and pasture land to control erosion and provide space for his 125-head herd of Holsteins.

1994-98 and is a current board member. He also is a board member of the county's Dairy Herd Improvement Association and is a deacon on the local First Christian Church.



In his 1979-vintage double 6 herringbone milking parlor, Robert Jackson notes that the herd bacteria count runs in the 2-3,000 range. Cows and milkers are washed before each milking, and Clorox is used as a disinfectant.



The senior Robert Jackson (on the tractor) is also a Master Farmer. Although retired in 1988, he helps out during the spring as he is able.

## 2000 Dietary Guidelines Acknowledge Dairy's Importance

ROSEMONT, IL. — Leaders of the National Dairy Council® (NDC), the nutrition research and communications arm of Dairy Management Inc.™ (DMI), applauded the federal government's recently-announced 2000 Dietary Guidelines, which maintains the old guideline's recommendation of two to three servings of dairy foods daily.

"One of the goals of the 2000 Dietary Guidelines is to provide consumers with simple steps to act on right now for good health. Getting those two to three servings of milk, cheese, yogurt and other dairy products is a simple and powerful action step toward that end," said Greg Miller, Ph.D., NDC vice president of nutrition research.

The 2000 Dietary Guidelines emphasize the importance of consuming good sources of calcium throughout life for healthy bones. Adolescents and adults over age 50 have "an especially high need for calcium," the guidelines state. Yogurt, milk and cheese top the list of recommended calcium sources.

In its advice to consumers, the new guidelines include other important references to dairy:

Low fat and fat-free dairy foods have the same nutrient content (except for saturated fat and calories) as the higher fat versions. This helps to correct a common misconception that lower-fat dairy foods might be lower in important nutrients.

Chocolate milk, though it contains some sugar, is high in vitamins and minerals and therefore is an important part of the daily diet, especially for those who need extra calories. It contains the same level of calcium as white milk.

Soft drinks and other sweets should not crowd lowfat milk from the diet, as milk is an excellent source of calcium and is

needed to maintain health.

Recent research has shown that calcium from soy-based beverage is absorbed only 75 percent as efficiently as from milk. In accordance with NDC's comments to the committee that authored the new guidelines, calcium-fortified soy beverages is not listed in the dairy group; soy is offered only as an option for those who prefer a non-dairy source of calcium.

For more information on the Dietary Guidelines and recent ground-breaking research showing the role of calcium and dairy products in preventing disease, visit NDC's Web site at [www.nationaldairycouncil.org](http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org) or DMI's main Web site at [www.dairyinfo.com](http://www.dairyinfo.com).

