

Showing Cattle Takes Year-Long Preparation For Savage Family

JAYNE SEBRIGHT
Lancaster Farming Staff

KNOXVILLE, Md. — What started as a 4-H project for Wayne Savage more than 30 years ago is now a year-round venture for the Savage family of Frederick County.

Wayne and Cindee Savage continued showing cattle after they were married in 1973. And, once each of their four children reached five years old and was big enough to handle their own animals, they encouraged them to begin showing.

Today 25-year-old Chip, 23-year-old Kelli, 20-year-old Jami, and 17-year-old Ryan are responsible for the show string, which is kept separately from the other cows the majority of the year to assure proper weight maintenance and provide specialized care.

The Savages own Savage-Leigh Farm, a 200-acre dairy farm, where they milk 230 cows and have about 200 replacement animals. In addition to the home farm, they rent about 500 acres. Jami's two Brown Swiss and Kelli and Ryan's four Jerseys add some color to the milking herd of primarily 100 percent registered Holsteins.

The Savage-Leigh herd boasts a rolling herd average of 27,000 pounds of milk, more than 1,100 pounds fat, and more than 900 pounds protein. Well known for both its outstanding milk production and high quality genetics, the herd is on the highest rating of the Holstein Association's Tri-Star program. For two years in a row, it was named the Top Tri-Star Herd in Maryland.

All four children work on the farm. Chip, who attended Virginia Polytechnical Institute (VPI) for one year, is responsible for the show cows and takes care of the merchandising and embryo transfer programs.

Kelli is the farm's herds person. A VPI graduate in Dairy Science, she milks two times a day and handles calf registration, herd checks, and record keeping for the herd.

Studying early childhood development at Frederick Community College, Jami takes care of the calves and younger heifers. Part of her job includes caring for the show heifers separately from the other replacements.

Ryan, who will attend VPI this fall, takes care of the crops

and equipment.

Wayne and Cindee oversee the operation with Wayne helping Kelli with the milkings and Cindee keeping the financial records.

In addition to the family, Dave Michalak, a VPI graduate, is the only other employee on the farm. He takes care of nutrition work and feeding the herd.

"Our children began working on the farm at a very young age," said Cindee. "When they were small, showing was their reward for working so hard on the farm. Since we never had time to go on family vacations, it was like a vacation for them."

Even though showing has always been something that the Savages enjoy doing, it also takes a lot of work. In February, the Savages make their final selections on what calves they will show in the summer yearling and senior calf classes that fall. Winter calves are selected in March.

Once the calves are selected as part of the show string, they are moved into a separate area where Jami can get them used to being tied up and kept on a halter.

The area is bedded up like show stalls, and Jami leaves them tied during the day, feeds them in a tub, and waters them with a bucket. In the evening, the animals are let loose to get exercise. She also begins washing them early in the spring to keep their hair clean.

"If you wash the animals when they still have their winter coats on, the hair underneath the winter coats will be extra clean once you clip them," said Jami.

"You should never clip an animal dirty," she said. "We usually clip the winter coats in March to assure plenty of time for the new hair to grow in before the spring show."

The show heifers are also kept separately from the other animals to prevent them from becoming overconditioned and to get them used to being around each other. While the other animals are fed a total mixed ration, the show animals are fed hay and a high protein diet, including 40 percent protein pellets.

The show cows are kept in separate box stalls from the rest of the herd. They are hand fed three times a day and kept on a

diet consisting of beet pulp, grain, and hay.

"They keep their conditioning better on this diet," said Cindee. "They have more dairyness and depth of rib."

The Savages take their show string to county, state, national, and international shows. In the spring, they travel to the state spring show.

The major showing season starts in July with the district show. In August is the Maryland State Fair. The All-American Dairy Show comes in September. And then they travel to Madison, Wis., in October for the World Dairy Expo. They finish up in November with the Mid-Eastern National Dairy Show in Louisville, Ky. The Savages have even showed a couple times at the Canadian Royale in Toronto, Canada.

"We don't drag our cows to all of the local and county shows," said Cindee. "The cows need their exercise, and too many shows can tire them out. Unless you're really trying to promote an animal, it's not necessary to take them to every show around."

The Savages have always encouraged their children to do everything on their own. "We told our children that if they didn't work with the animals at home and didn't take care of them, then they didn't get to show them," said Wayne and Cindee. "It was their responsibility to make the animal look as good as they possibly could."

Although the Savages taught their children the basics in showing, the kids fine-tuned their showing skills while watching expert showmen and fitters at the various shows.

"When Chip was little, he used to stand and watch people like Billy Jo Heath and Chris Hill fit the animals," said Cindee. "Douglas and Mary King of Kingstead Farm, along with George Edgerton, really worked with Chip and taught him showing techniques like holding the head at the right angle and setting up the feet properly."

The Savages have learned a lot from going to shows and visiting with dairy people from all over the continent.

"We've gotten to interact with some of the top breeders in the industry and made a lot of friends through showing," said Cindee. "When you're at the shows, you can talk to people from different areas and they'll tell you about their operation. You can take their ideas and try to adapt them to your own farm."

When the children were young, Cindee used to video tape them so they could critique their showing skills after the show.

"Parents often put too much stress on their children by expecting them to win," said Cindee. "I always let my kids decide how to handle their animals. I always encouraged them to never make excuses why they didn't win, but to look for ways they could improve so they could win next time."

Wayne and Cindee have worked hard to instill good sportsmanship in their children. "There's been times when we've been disappointed with a placing at one show and then have that animal win at the next show," said Cindee. "No matter what happens, we want them to congratulate the winner."



The Savages have won many premier breeder and exhibitor awards at the various shows. Here are Chip, Cindee, and Kelli accepting the premier breeder award for the 1997 Mid-East National Holstein Show in Louisville, KY.



Savage-Leigh Bellwood Linda, EX 92, owned by Ryan is well-known in the Holstein industry. She was named reserve grand champion at the Maryland Spring Show in both 1999 and 2000. Linda, along with the other show cows, is kept in a separate area from the milking herd to receive extra care.

Cindee always reminds her 4-H kids that at each show it is only that one judge's opinion on that particular day.

"The worst thing you can do is be a bad sport and intimidate the judge," she said. "You don't want to burn bridges that you have to cross again in the future."

Although show ring ethics has received some negative publicity, the Savages only have positive things to say about the professional fitters and show crew who help them prepare their animals for the shows.

"Working with professional fitters and showmen has had a very positive impact on our children," said Wayne. "If we are going to spend the money to show, we want our animals to look good."

"All breeders and show people need to work together and compliment each other," said Cindy. "Negative comments about other breeders only make you look bad."

The Savages also work hard to create a positive image of the dairy industry when they show. "The appearance of the showman is important," said Cindee. "Their job is to show off the animal and be almost invisible. However they should look

neat."

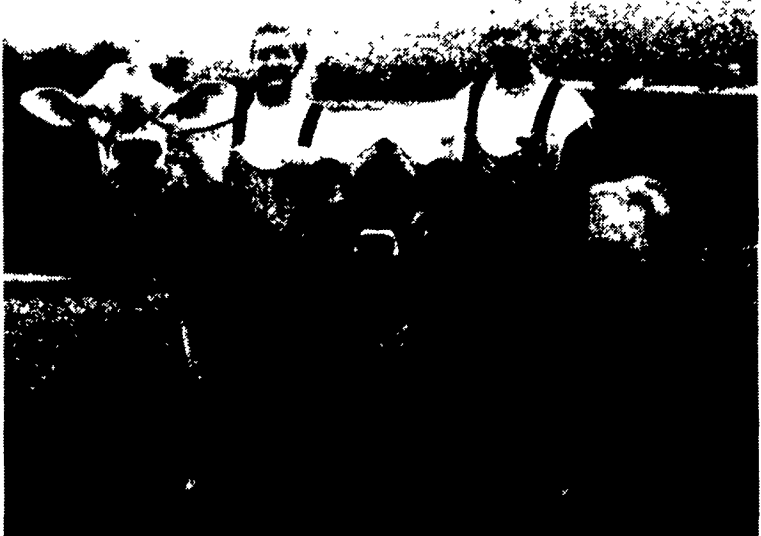
Keeping the stall area clean is also a priority for the Savages. "When you're at the shows, you want people to see a neat and organized display," said Cindee. "People don't want to see a cluttered aisle or cots scattered around."

According to the Savages, showing has helped them build recognition for their herd, from which they have sold embryos worldwide. "The animals you take to the shows can show people the type of animal you can breed at home."

To Cindee, breeding cattle has always seemed like an art. "You have to really study families and know genetics," she said. "I love watching the shows at Madison because there are so many outstanding cows there. It amazes me to see the different type traits that are carried through in the different families."

Although both Wayne and Cindee enjoy going to the shows, they now let their children handle the show string.

"All of our children are very independent and quite capable of taking care of the animals themselves," said Wayne and Cindee. "Now we only have to go on show day."



Both Ryan and Jami have enjoyed tremendous success in the show ring. Jami is at the halter of her Brown Swiss, GS FLJ Tippy-ET, EX 91, who has been named both junior champion and reserve junior champion at the World Dairy Expo. She is also a two-time unanimous All-American winner. Ryan's Jersey, Triple-S-Imperial Minuet, EX 91, was supreme champion of the 4-H show at the 1999 Maryland State Fair.

the Signature
FFA of
Success