

Bowman Family: 'We Just Do The Best Job We Can'

(Continued from Page A1)

mans' families.

Said Gary, "we receive a lot of help from our families. Both sides pitch in, either with milking or the fieldwork. They help make it all work."

Gary has seen a big difference in the industry in his years of farming. "It is changing fast and I don't know how to feel about that. It's more of a business, which takes some of the fun out of it, but it's different for every farmer's situation."

Regarding trends of the business, Bowman has noticed more fluctuation in milk price. "The margin of error isn't what is used to be. In order to make a living, it's a more detailed business than in the past."

"The trend is to the bigger herds and expansion. I don't see doing that myself, but it does seem like that is the trend. It seems like you have to keep milking more cows to make a living. For us, instead of milking more cows, we went to three times a day — that was our expansion. I still like small herds, tiestall barns, and the individual attention I can give to each cow."

No Trade Secrets

According to Gary, milking three times a day is a large factor in the herd's low somatic cell count, as the extra milking takes stress off of the cow and the udder. The cows are milked at 5 a.m., 1 p.m., and 8 p.m.

"The biggest issue is labor," said Gary. "We have five people we can call if we want to go anywhere, so we've been fortunate that way."

"I think that in lowering the somatic cell count, three times a day milking has made the biggest difference. I'm not here to push it (milking three times a day). You have to want to do it, it's not for everyone, but we have seen a difference."

"If a cow is a heavy milker and gets milked two times a day, you'll have a better chance of mastitis if she's leaking all day and laying in her stall," said Jenny.

The rolling herd average is 25,000 pounds, with 994 pounds of fat and more than 750 pounds protein. The rolling average cell count is 70,000.

"The first thing people always ask is, 'What is your secret, what's the trick?'" said Gary. "The second thing they want to know is what kind of teat dip we use. We've tried all different kinds."

The brand, according to Jenny, is not the trade secret; however using teat dip is important. The couple uses a basic iodine dip.

Gary believes that teat dip is relied upon too heavily. "You can't dip a cow and then let her lay in mud and expect the teat dip to take care of everything. As far as a secret or trick, there is none."

However keeping the cows clean and not letting them lie down in a dirty stall is key, said Jenny.

Routinely budgeting time for stall maintenance is another reason for a lower cell count.

"We try to just keep the stalls cleaned and bedded every day. There is no real trick to it, we just make sure that we do," said Gary.

Bedding, while not a major factor, may also contribute to cow health. "We used to use hardwood sawdust and we had



Mark, 2, makes friends with the farm's resident cat, "Mary."

some trouble with mastitis," said Gary. "The vet recommended we go to softwood shavings, so that's what we did and we like them better."

The Bowmans also practice careful herd management to keep somatic cell counts low. "If we have a cow that's consistently high, she usually ends up going for beef, even if she's a good milker," said Jenny.

Fresh air and ranging over the pasture also gives the Bowman's herd a health boost. "We turn the milk cows out in the summer overnight and in winter for exercise in the morning if the weather's cooperating. I'm a big fan of giving the cows exercise. I think that's important," Gary said.

Workday Focus

Although field work takes time from the Bowman's workday, "most of our day is spent working around cattle," he said. They breed 100 percent AI.

"I used to breed the cows myself, but when we went to milking three times a day we got busier, so now we have a technician."

"We focus on the udders, that's the first thing we look at. We also look at the feet and legs and overall cow. We breed more for type than for milk, since we want to breed for a cow that's going to last for many lactations."

"We feel that with nutrition and milking, we can get milk out of them since we don't breed straight for milk. We don't sacrifice type for milk."

"Getting milk boils down to good forage. If you don't have good forage, it's tough going. That's what we found."

Producers can make up a good ration, said Gary, "but if the forage didn't test well it's harder to get good production out of the ration."

The Bowmans buy shelled corn and a concentrate, but grow the remaining feed on the farm's 100 tillable acres.

Gary said, "We do have a lot of help with the fieldwork, and we get some custom work done. I enjoy fieldwork, but the cows more. After a while, I'd sooner be in the barn."

"We also spend a lot of time with our dry cows, and we try not to neglect them," said Gary. As soon as a cow is dry, the Bowmans put her out on their 20-acre pasture.

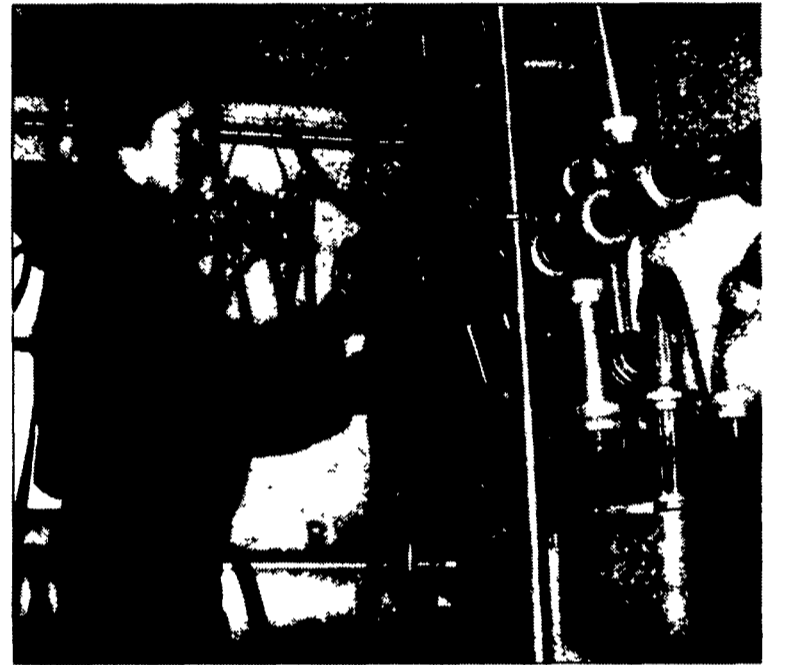
"It seems to be a good, clean environment for the cow. It is up on a hill, so there are no mud holes. I found that to really help. I also vaccinate the dry cows with a J5 vaccine."

They noticed more mastitis problems in the winter than in the summer when the cows are on the pasture more often.

The couple has also had success with double-dosage dry cow treatments. "If a cow calves and is consistently high in cell counts for her first lactation, over 3.5 cell count, when I dry her off I'll give her two instead of one dry cow tube per quarter. But some cows are just consistently high," said Gary.



Gary takes care of the morning feeding. "I enjoy fieldwork, but the cows more. After a while, I'd sooner be in the barn," he said.



Jenny hangs up the milkers in preparation for one of the three-times-a-day milkings at the farm.

The Bowmans make sure to run an antibiotic test on all the fresh cows' milk before shipping it.

Finding Fulfillment

The opportunity to put down roots keeps the Bowman family at Four Leaf Acres. The couple is not looking to expand or leave the farm, where they are "pretty content," Gary said. "We've moved too many times already. We don't want to move again."

"We like this farm and we have a good relationship with our landlord. We are also thankful for our good neighbors," said Jenny.

Although dairy farming may be demanding, the work also offers fulfillment. "There's definitely satisfaction in it," he said. "You get out of it what you put into it. I do enjoy cows and working with cows. I guess farming has always been a challenge to me. You could say it's in our blood. As with any job, there are times when I wonder why I'm doing it, but being able to raise our family on a farm is important to us. It teaches them a good work ethic and that not everything in life goes as planned. The fact is, we enjoy working with cows."

Dairy Farm Accounting - Computer Training

Dairy producers, their spouses and anyone else who is interested in sharpening their computerized accounting skills are encouraged to attend a four-part training series designed to improve and standardize dairy farm accounting procedures. The hands-on computer training sessions will be offered in four counties throughout the Capital Region including: Lancaster, York, Franklin and Adams counties.

Basic computerized farm accounting concepts will be demonstrated using QuickBooks Pro for Windows. Instruction includes basic operation of the accounting system, special dairy farm accounting issues, entering feed costs, and enterprise accounting.

Report demonstrations include cash and accrual profit-and-loss statements, budget reports, payroll, and

employment tax reports, and determining cost of production per unit. Participants will receive a sample file with a chart of accounts that is setup and ready to use for their farm.

Tim Beck, Regional Dairy Program Coordinator, will instruct two days of the workshop focusing on specific computer skills and knowledge required to operate the accounting system. Participants will practice general program operation including data entry, setting up the program and printing reports. Specific topics to be addressed include:

- Introduction to Software
- Setting Up the Program
- Basic Operation of the Accounting System
- Generating Reports

Brad Hilty, Dairy Alliance Information Management Specialist, will teach dairy

accounting practices during two days of the course. To properly analyze and benchmark financial information, producers need to consistently categorize and record transactions regardless of the accounting software used to maintain farm records. Working with industry financial leaders throughout Pennsylvania, Brad has developed a standardized chart of accounts to record dairy information in a consistent manner. During two days of the program, participants will learn to use this chart of accounts and will receive instruction on developing and interpreting reports.

Topics to be covered include:

- Standardized Chart of Accounts
- Understanding Financial Statements
- Special Accounting Issues

- Enterprise Accounting
- Benchmarking and Analyzing Data

All sessions are conducted from 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM. Locations and dates are as follows:

January 15, 19, 23, 26, Lancaster County Extension Office.

January 22, 25, 29, Feb. 2, York County Extension Office

February 5, 7, 9, 12, Adams County Extension Office.

February 19, 21, 23, 26, Franklin County Extension Office

Registration fee for the four-day sessions is \$75 for each participant. Lunch is on your own. Space is limited and registrations will be accepted on a first-come basis. To register, contact the Customer Service desk at the York County Extension Office, 112 Pleasant Acres Road, York PA 17402. Telephone 717-840-7408, FAX 717-755-5968 or email Tim Beck at tbeck@psu.edu