

# Hoover Family Begins Farm Show Career



Brenden, Aaron, Brad, and Audrey join Myra, a Farm Show veteran from last year. The Holstein will return this year to compete as a 4-year-old.

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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — Farm Show. The gathering of throngs of people, agricultural and agribusiness displays, good food, bad weather, and, of course, myriads of livestock competitions.

The Hoover family is excited to be a part of it.

Last year Brad, 16, and Aaron, 14, spent the full week with their three animals at the show. This coming year Brenden, 12, will raise that number to four as he brings this year's 4-H heifer, "Inkie," to compete. They have been 4-H members since they were eight, giving them the necessary fitting and showmanship knowledge.

Even though dairy farming runs in the Hoover family tree from Reid, the attraction to the show ring may come from Diane, who showed Ayrshires almost

every year along with most of her family. Last year was the first year the Hoover boys competed in Harrisburg.

"We thought they were old enough. It is something they're doing and we don't have to be there all the time," said Diane. "There were other young kids from the county with their cattle, and they had them together, so they could help each other."

"They're big enough that we could still run the farm and not be there," said Reid. "They showed they could take care of things and be responsible."

Along with Reid's brother, the family crops 500 acres of corn, alfalfa, and soybeans. Reid grew up on the farm, which has been in the family since 1963. After moving away for a short time, Reid brought his family back to the home farm, where they have lived for 14 years.

The Farm Show, according to

Reid, is a unique public relations opportunity. "There are a lot of people there that aren't farmers, and we wanted the boys to keep things clean and neat, to be polite."

"It's your advertising, your image," said Diane.

Four-year-old Holstein, Myra, stationed on the end of a row, had her own public relations campaign as she had a lot of pictures taken of her, according to Brad.

Even though last year marked the Hoovers' inaugural year at the Farm Show, packing was not an insurmountable challenge because they had helped friends the previous year, "so we knew what to pack," said Aaron.

Brad also gained experience this year in Madison, Wis., at the World Dairy Expo — expertise he's eager to test in Harrisburg. Brad was able to spend a week in Madison fitting cows, an educational experience he hopes to translate to his own animals this year.

Sister Audrey, 9, may also be headed for the show ring in future years. She exhibited a calf when she was seven. "We're not sure who showed whom," said Diane. Besides helping to feed the calves, Audrey takes care of the family's 16 chickens.

Calf feeding rotates among Hoover siblings according to football and basketball seasons, and who is playing what sport, according to Diane.

The animals the Hoovers showed at the Farm Show were homebred. Reid, who is especially interested in the breeding aspect of dairy farming, enjoys the challenge of breeding for a quality calf. "We like seeing if we can breed something that can compete with the others," said Diane.

"We enjoy milking cows, but breeding just adds flavor and a challenge," said Reid. "Genetics is interesting to me, to see how you can improve."

The show ring adds interest to dairy farming for the younger generation, according to Reid. "As parents, we like to see that," he said, noting the decrease in the number of farmers and the

increase in the average age of farmers.

"Showing teaches preparation and work, if you're first or last," said Reid. "You have to be dedicated and willing to work hard. You just can't go up there and not prepare for it. You have to work with them before the Farm Show. It teaches responsibility, not just on the farm, but in anything."

"Showing teaches winning and losing graciously," said Diane.

Besides taking advantage of the array of famous Farm Show food, the Hoovers enjoyed meeting a lot of new people and learning more about fitting during their week at the show.

One unforgettable experience, said Aaron, came in the middle of the night, when the brothers were abruptly awakened by a horse as it put a large hoof through their plastic show-box, leaving a large hole which still remains.

"I was sleeping right on the other side," said Aaron.

A typical day at the Farm Show includes clipping the animals, which takes the most time, according to Brad, at 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. before the crowds arrive. Lines begin to form even in the early morning hours as exhibitors hurry to wash their animals during the quieter time of the day. Keeping the animals clean, said Brad, also keeps the Hoovers busy during the week.

The Hoovers transport the

animals but also her boys with ample supplies of food during the week.

"There's a lot of preparation before you get there," said Brad. The family puts their heifers on a special ration of protein to grow the animals out, plus hay to fill them out.

"Or we work the weight off of them," said Aaron.

This extra time and attention to the Farm Show animals is freely given. "They (the Hoover family) would say I baby them," said Brad. "I probably spend more time with the show cows than the other cows."

The Farm Show provides exhibitors with a bag of peanut hulls upon arrival. The family takes their own straw, hay, and



silage mix to supplement the hulls for bedding.

They will also place a call to the veterinarian to make sure their animals have the proper vaccinations and shots before making the trip.

Since schoolwork and regular farm work takes up much of their time, the Hoovers look to Christmas vacation as the key time of preparation.

"Each time we take them out we practice setting them," said Aaron. He is looking forward to



Brenden and Audrey, along with help from Aaron, take care of feeding the farm's calves. The Hoovers milk 130 registered Holsteins.

load of food, clothing, beds, sleeping bags, fitting equipment, plus food and bedding for the animals needed for the week away from home. Even with all this material, however, exhibitors may not use a stall or the aisles for storage space. Exhibitors are assigned specific spots in the barn, but may request to be next to another exhibitor.

"For their first year showing we had really good weather," said Diane, who is crossing her fingers for a repeat this year, despite the long track record of a snowy Farm Show week. "Large amounts of snow would make it difficult to get feed up there." Diane not only provided the ani-

the gaining more show ring experience.

Seeing other top cows and comparing them to his own animals is one aspect of the show that Brad is looking forward to.

Brad and Aaron learned firsthand about the difficulty of moving their animals through the crowds, "especially when you have one that's flighty," said Aaron.

Even though preparation may take large amounts of time and thought, the Farm Show experience is worth the trouble, say the Hoovers.

"It's not all work," said Brad. "We also had a lot of fun."



Reid, Diane, Brenden, 12; Audrey, 9; Brad, 16; and Aaron, 14, operate a Lebanon County dairy farm. This year the family purchased their biggest Christmas tree yet, according to Diane.