

# Pleasant View Farms Expand Toward The Future

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MARTINSBURG (Blair Co.)

— The homestead of Pleasant View Farms is nestled in a beautiful fertile valley of southern Blair County known as Morrisons Cove.

Today, Pleasant View Farms comprises 3,600 acres, approximately half of which is rented ground. The farm includes 3,000 head of Holstein cattle, including more than 1,500 head of milking animals at two locations — heifers, calves, Holstein steers, and breeding bulls.

The farm partnership, owned by Rodney Metzler and sons, has a rich heritage with roots tracing back to Lancaster County.

In 1898, the Metzler family moved to Blair County from Lancaster. At that time, the Metzlers were Mennonites. Rodney's great-grandfather was a preacher in the Mennonite church. The family moved west because of a split in beliefs about Sunday School. The Metzlers moved to the Martinsburg area and the first church was located on the present-day site of the Metzler homestead. In the spring of 1898, there was a barn fire at the homestead and the barn that grandfather Metzler rebuilt still stands today.

Through the generations, the farm was passed on through the sons and fathers, each starting with a partnership in which each son eventually bought out his father. Rodney entered a partnership with his father, LC Metzler, right after he was graduated from high school. A few years later in 1969, Rodney bought out his father's share of the partnership.

In the ensuing years, Rodney purchased several dairy farms in the "Cove." At one point, the Metzlers were milking cows at four different farms. For 15 years, Pleasant View Farms consisted of dairy operations at three different locations.

In the mid to late 1990s, it was becoming apparent that something had to give. Operating dairies at multiple locations was inefficient. It was difficult to find and keep good help. The facilities were labor intensive.

In 1998, the Metzlers began milking at their new state of the art dairy facilities, built on the homestead, located southwest of Martinsburg near the Blair/Bedford county line. New barns, a modern parallel parlor, and offices were built by Kings Construction of New Holland. Today there are 1,100 cows milking at the new Pleasant View Farms dairy facilities.

The Surge double-25 parallel parlor makes milking a pleasant task. The fully computerized system features an inline drip sampler and flow meter for in-house

sampling and weighing. The freestalls and holding areas have slatted floors, an investment the Metzlers are glad they made.

The "milk house" facilities consist of a plate cooler and a direct load system. Pleasant View Farms is one of only three direct load dairy farms in Pennsylvania. The cows are milked three times a day, with about 200 cows through the parlor an hour. With milking and clean up, the parlor is only idle about three hours out of every day.

The Metzlers continue to milk cows at a second location known as the Piney Creek Farm. This location is home to 275 milking animals, 93,000 pounds of milk are shipped each day from the two locations together. Milk is sold to Dairy Farmers of America (DFA). The Pleasant View home farm milk is Order 5 and Order 7; milk sent to the south for fluid milk processing. The Piney Creek farm is under the Virginia Milk Commission Base program.

Both Pleasant View Farms boast excellent butterfat percentages and low SCC. The Piney Creek farm averages between 3.9 percent-4.0 percent butterfat, while the larger herd at the home place runs close to 3.8 percent butterfat. Both herds have very low SCC, most months less than 200,000. The Metzlers pass on the quality bonuses to their employees through incentive programs based on quality performance.

One improvement Rodney would like to see made with his new barn is a larger special needs area and mini-parlor to milk and care for treated cows. In fact, there are plans to add just such improvements within the near future, along with a freestall barn for an additional 400 cows.

In July 2000, the Metzlers purchased the former Mowry Farms in New Enterprise, Bedford County. This large multifarm purchase enabled the Metzlers to have more land for crops and manure disposal as well as a location for some much needed heifer facilities. This location now houses 500 heifers and has streamlined the daily heifer care duties. Previously, all the heifers were at different farms. The Mowry farm consisted of 600 additional acres. The Metzlers have since sold off some non-tillable acreage and rented some additional farm ground nearby.

In the heart of Morrisons Cove, where the majority of the Pleasant View Farms acreage is located, land values are strong. A neighboring dairy farm of 86 acres recently sold for \$6,300 per acre. Land for agricultural use commonly sells for between \$5,000-\$6,500 per acre. Accordingly, rent in the area is expensive as well, often between \$100-\$150 per acre. The Metz-

lers' investment in the additional land in Bedford County has given them a more affordable base for crops and manure management.

The family corporation consists of Rodney Metzler, president and his wife Gretchen Metzler, vice president. The couple's two grown sons, R. Troy and L. Marshall, are also members of the Metzler Family LLC. Rodney and Gretchen believe it is very important to ensure that the farm can stay in the family and have invested in extensive estate planning. Their sons have important roles in the day-to-day operation of the farms.

Troy Metzler is the herd man-

agement, offering his insights as a large producer and staying on top of the current regulations.

Rodney believes very strongly in good employee relationships. Rodney is not merely an office manager, he is just as likely to be seen helping Marshall in the fields as he is to be found taking care of business in the office. He thinks it is important that the employees know that you are in this business with them, not just on the sidelines giving orders.

The new office area is complete with an employee break room. The Metzlers provide their employees with a quarterly newsletter, The PVF Farmer. The Spring 2001 edition consisted of 21 pages of farm news, birthday

management, offering his insights as a large producer and staying on top of the current regulations.

Rodney Metzler is a man whose motto is "never pass up an opportunity." He says that he was never "given" anything but an opportunity. From that first opportunity to buy out his father's share of the farm partnership, Rodney has taken many other risks that have paid off. Rodney was part owner in the local feed mill, Martinsburg Milling, for 11 years, until the partners sold out to Pennfield Feeds in 1996. He is also a partner in Wineland's Equipment, the local John Deere dealership. But the



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ager, overseeing the herd staff and the calf operation. Much of the herd records are kept on Dairy Comp. 305. There are two computers in the herdsman's office. The milking parlor is managed by Scott Myers and Troy is assisted by herdsman Charlie Dively and assistant herdsman Matt Brink. Troy's wife Jennifer, works part-time on the farm, handling the payroll, employee scheduling, and assisting her husband with the farm's record keeping.

The Metzlers keep very extensive records on all animals on the farm and work diligently to stay on top of herd health issues. No small task in a herd of this size, but a very important part of Pleasant View Farm's successful management. Troy and Jennifer have two young children, a daughter Jenna, age 2½, and a son Noah Rodney, 5 months.

Marshal Metzler is the crops manager, overseeing all of the crops produced on the 3,600 total acres. He also oversees the maintenance and repairs of the equipment, which is managed by Gerald Clouse, shop and Tom Laird, combine.

The Metzlers raise nearly all of the feed fed on the farms, including 2,000 acres of corn, 120 acres of soybeans, 120 acres of barley, and the balance in alfalfa hay. Feed purchased includes some cotton, brewer's grain, and extra soybeans.

Marshall's wife Holly works part-time at another Metzler owned business, Metzler Bros. Truck Repair, as office manager. Marshall and Holly have a son Cauleen, age 3½, and are expecting another child in early June.

Obviously, an operation of this size takes much delegation. The Metzlers employ a total of 21 full-time and seven part-time employees. Rodney notes that finding good employees used to be one of the biggest trials of the business, but since they have moved into

and anniversary recognitions, notes from employee meetings, farm safety tips and interested articles reprinted from other ag sources. A benefit package is also offered to the full-time employees. The Metzlers treat their employees and their families to several special events throughout the year, including a Christmas party.

A monthly management meeting is conducted by Rodney, Troy, and Marshall for the managers of the various departments. This meeting is also attended by the herd vet and nutritionist. The meeting gives the staff the opportunity to communicate problem areas and work toward improvement.

There are weekly vet check-ups by local large animal veterinarians Joseph Itle and Shawn Orebeck. These visits are primarily pregnancy checks and trouble shooting. Troy and his staff manage the breeding and reproductive health of milking herd. Independent nutritionist David Pollard balances the herd's TMR ration and provides the Metzlers with weekly service.

Another feature of the new barns and office area at Pleasant View is the parlor observation deck. This area enables the Metzlers to welcome visitors to their farms without compromising the farm's biosecurity. The observation deck also provides area school children with a bird's-eye view of a modern dairy farm at work and it makes a comfortable location for the monthly meetings.

Because of the herd size and proximity to residential dwellings, the Metzlers have a keen eye on waste management issues. Rodney believes that regulations in manure management will shape the future of agriculture, and sites this as his main justification for a large land base. He tries to stay involved with the ongoing discussion about waste

business that commands the most of his time off the farm is a partnership with his brother Don, Metzler Brother's Transport, Inc.

Metzler Brother's Transport was born of a need for a milk hauler during a time that Pleasant View Farms shipped their milk to an independent dairy. Seeing an opportunity for a new business that would compliment the dairy farm, the Metzler brothers began with one leased truck hauling milk from three farms, in addition to the Pleasant View Farms.

Today, Metzler Brother's Transport hauls 14 loads of milk a day, in addition to loads of commodities with a total of 47 trucks on the road.

After a few years in the trucking business, the Metzlers saw a need for a repair shop and turned that opportunity into another business. Metzler Brother's Tank, Truck, and Trailer works on all types of large trucks, specializing in tankers. Today, the repair business has 12 employees and a growing list of clients.

Rodney Metzler doesn't see the future of the dairy industry solely in the hands of large commercial operations. His heart is still with the small dairy farmers, who he calls "the backbone of our industry."

Rodney realizes that not everyone want to milk a thousand cows and doesn't support any changes that would force that on the dairy industry. He believes that if there is ever any type of milk pricing policy change in this country, such as a quota or downsizing to demand, it should protect the small farmers and make provisions for new startups.

He believes that the successful dairy producer will be the one that makes the most of every opportunity and is willing to cooperate with fellow dairy producer to make the business more profitable for all dairy farmers.

## Central Susquehanna Extension Plans Grazing Meeting

DANVILLE (Montour Co.) — Penn State Cooperative Extension is sponsoring a meeting for persons interested in pasture and grazing management and direct marketing of agricultural products.

The meeting will be Tuesday, June 12, at 7 p.m. at Gordon and Terri Roup's farm in Montour County. The Roups have 21 Limousin cows and 100 mostly Dorset ewes. They are using 140 acres of hay/pasture and have 165 acres fenced. They use a combination of conventional and marketing.

Take Mexico Road (get on Mexico Road from either Route 254 just west of Washingtonville or from Route 642 just east of Milton) and turn south onto Narehood Road at the Hansen Quarry. Go across the bridge and bear right and the farm is on the left about a mile from Mexico Road. Look for a sign for the meeting.

Participants are reminded to wear different shoes than are normally worn around their own livestock. For more information, call Dave Hartman, extension agent, at 784-6660 or 1-800-254-6470.