

Quality Products

(Continued from Page A39)

efficient way to offer a complete product line, they believe it is the only way they can guarantee the quality of the products they sell.

"Our local delivery customers demand products," said Bill Itle, "and we demand quality. It's part of our commitment to customer service."

The Itles believe that the quality of care their cows receive directly affects the quality of the end product. The cows are milked three times a day. They are housed in comfort freestalls jettied with sand. Jan Itle sites the sand bedding as "one of the best things we've ever done." The sand bedding has eliminated nearly every case of coliform mastitis and has improved overall udder health.

All cows get out on dirt at least once a day — one group after the morning milking and the other after evening milking. Dry cows also spend a good deal of time on grass. Valewood Farms has a regular hoof trimming schedule. In order to keep cows comfortable, they trim an average of every three months. "The whole idea is to have a contented cow," said Jan Itle. The Itles feel they should be caretakers of their animals. Everyone in the family has a role in that, as the siblings take turns milking evenings and weekends.

Longevity is also an important factor in Valewood Farms success. The cows at Valewood routinely live to be 7-8 years of age. This testifies to the quality of care and allows for additional cash flow in the form of replacements to sell. It also enables Valewood Farms to be a closed herd, another issue that the Itles feel is vital to quality assurance.

Valewood Farms recently underwent the process of becoming certified as a producer of "Free Farmed" foods. Valewood Farms is the first dairy on the East Coast authorized to use the "Free Farmed" label. It certifies that the herd is being monitored by the American Humane Association, a conservative organization committed to the "common sense" care of farm animals. The Itles believe this is a tremendous marketing tool for their products and an ideal association, as they were already doing nearly everything required to become certified.

The only change that was necessary was to cease tail docking. The Itles are confident in the mission of the American Humane Association. Unlike some organizations that use the word "humane," the American Humane Association is not a radical animal rights group. The Itles have worked with some very good people, including Dr. Brenda Coe of Penn State Uni-

versity, who understands the mechanics and finances of dairy farming, as well as the need to be good caretakers of the animals.

Sales manager Dan Itle sees the "Free Farmed" label as a way to set themselves apart in the market place. "We don't want to be like everyone else. We want to be different. We want to have the best products and the best service" he said.

Another aspect of the Valewood Farms that sets them apart and keeps them connected with their customers is their commitment to public education about the dairy industry. The Itle family provides leadership and support for the Cambria County Dairy Promotion program as well as the 4-H Dairy Club. Cambria County is primarily a suburban area, with little active farming and few dairy farms. The family feels that dairy farmers need to take responsibility to "bring kids in and show them where their food starts. Anyone you come in contact with as a young person, those are the ones you impact." Jan Itle said about her school tours. In October alone, Valewood hosted some 300 school children.

Last year, as a way to introduce consumers to their new dairy store, Valewood Farms hosted a Pumpkin Patch during October weekends. The event was such a success that it was

brought back this year as well. During two weekends in October the area around the dairy store was turned into a pumpkin patch, with pumpkins for sale in all sizes as well as fall mums, corn stalks, Indian corn, and other fall decorations. Two highlights of the event were the pumpkin ice cream and the "corn box," a giant sand box filled with shelled corn. Visitors could see a calf up close and meet the Blair County dairy princess and the Cambria County dairy maid.

The family really enjoys getting to know their buying public. "Last week I met a man who

told me he has been buying Valewood milk for 51 years. He told me how he used to get home delivery from my Dad. Now that's a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment," said Jan Itle.

Knowing that their customers are just a phone call away is a good motivation to keep their high standards of quality. It is a passion that the Itle family shares and hopes to pass down to the next generation.

"Our Dad taught us if you aren't going to do it right, don't do it," said Bill Itle. That "old-fashioned" thinking has been the key to success for Valewood Farms.

\$45.2 Million To Biosecurity

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Recently, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced that President Bush has proposed the allocation of \$45.2 million to USDA as part of a \$20 billion submission to Congress for emergency funding to strengthen essential programs and services related to biosecurity issues.

"The President's proposed emergency funding for USDA will help advance the next phase of our emergency preparedness activities and will help meet our critical infrastructure needs," said Veneman. "We have taken the appropriate steps to date to ensure the critical needs for

USDA are met; however, we must remain vigilant in protecting our nation's food and agriculture."

The President's proposed allocation of \$45.2 million to USDA will enhance other actions taken throughout other federal departments to increase homeland security. The funding proposed for USDA would support:

- Enhanced security for USDA facilities (\$17.2 million).
- Design and construction of a satellite facility at the USDA laboratory in Ames, Iowa for research activities (\$14.1 million).
- Technical assistance to state, local, federal, and private sector entities to improve biosecurity (\$5.0 million).
- Education and training to strengthen response mechanisms to potential food supply threats, improve data collection and dissemination, and other biosecurity activities (\$8.9 million).

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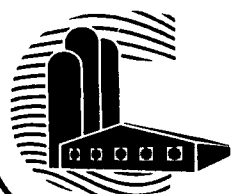
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