

# Horning Family Belongs On 'Meant To Be Farm'

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Food And Family  
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LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Nevin and Denise Horning are unique in this day of escalating land costs and fickle milk prices. Neither Nevin nor Denise were raised on farms, but today this young couple own 55 acres of prime Lancaster County farmland, 90 milking cows, and replacements.

How did they attain a farm without the benefit of taking over a family-owned operation?

"It was meant to be," Denise said with a bit of awe still evident in her voice from the purchase that took place in 2001.

"Meant To Be Farm" is the farm's working name. Denise explained that the original owners had purchased a larger farm and thought they would need to sell the Lititz one. After selling it to the Hornings, the original owners found out they did not need to sell it after all, and voiced their confusion to their listing real estate agent.

"It was meant to be," the Hornings maintain of the farm that is an answer to their prayers and to biblical scripture Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

The answer to their prayers was actually the unfolding of an 11-year quest.

As a teen-ager, Nevin started out working for his dairy farm uncle. It wasn't long before he knew he wanted dairy farming as his life's vocation. Soon he was working as a herdsman for another farmer, and eventually purchased the small herd. The Hornings rented a farm for several years until they needed to move because the landlord's son wanted to take over the farm.

That's when the Hornings discovered their present location, which had been operated as a hog farm. The Hornings weren't interested in hog farming, but the 170-sow operation was in place and a viable business.

So a made-to-order setup was put into place. Nevin's younger brother Lewis and his wife Amy manage the hog operation and also help with milking.



**Nevin and Denise Horning — with Destinee, 11; twins Marcia and Monica, 9; Austin, 6; and Vanessa, 4 — farm 55 acres and milk 90 cows in Lititz.**

The Hornings erected a 40X80-foot 80-cow tiestall tunnel-ventilated barn. They moved their original herd of 45 cows and purchased an addition 32 cows placed on a three-times-a-day milking schedule.

According to Beth Trachte, who takes care of the veterinarian work for the Hornings, the family attained a proven track record while renting their former farm, and have experienced remarkable success within a short period of time at their new place. The 32 cows that they had purchased locally had only been averaging 74 pounds, but increased to 96-pound average within 60 days.

In fact, the rolling herd average is 31,076 pounds and climbing.

"They are self-started people, highly motivated, and pay attention to detail and consistency, and still manage to keep things simple," Trachte said of the Hornings.

Nevin said that adapting to a new setup took some time, changes are still being made, and obstacles are being worked out.

One of the problems they faced at the new facility was that it was more difficult to detect heat because the herd has been kept in the barn. But a week ago, a dry lot was completed, and Nevin expects it to be much easier to detect cows in heat. The calving interval is 13.7 months.

The herd is fed total mixed rations two times daily but feed is provided four times daily.

The Hornings have used BST since February 1994. They have 1.4 services per pregnancy and 1.6 for all cows, which is considered excellent, according to Trachte. Lancaster County averages are 2.2 and 2.9 service. The 21-day pregnancy rate is 17 percent compared with the county average of 11-12 percent.

In addition to the newly-built barn, two silos, feed bins, and a manure pit were installed. A dry cow barn is attached to the new one. Heifers are raised adjacent to the new barn.

They raise corn and alfalfa hay and purchase forages from neighboring farmers to whom they are able to sell manure.

One of the Hornings' top priorities is to work together as a family. Although their children range in ages from four to 11 years, each helps out on the farm in a responsibility they enjoy.

"Destinee loves the barn. She'd rather be there than in the house. She's up at 6 a.m.," her mother said.

"I like helping with milking," Destinee said. So does her 9-year-old sister Marcia. Her twin, Monica, prefers scraping the barn. The younger children like to help with calf care.

"The farm is a good place to

raise a family," Denise said. "The farm is a business — and needs to be operated as one — but to keep it going, we need to take time away from it."

The Hornings recently returned from a three-day camping trip. While they were gone, Lewis and Amy took care of the herd in addition to their daily care of the hog operation.

This month the Hornings will have an all-expense paid trip to Minnesota as Land O' Lakes young producers.

Originally the families hope to arrange an every-other weekend off. But the three-times daily milking schedule makes that unrealistic. "It's just too much work for one family," Denise said.

During a recent open house on the Horning's farm, Jay Mylin of Lancaster DHIA said that he is impressed by the Hornings' ability to maintain professionalism and yet operate it as a family farm.

The Hornings' mission statement is to provide high quality dairy products at a profit, follow Godly principles of honesty, integrity, and good stewardship, provide a healthy family atmosphere, and be a positive influence in the community.

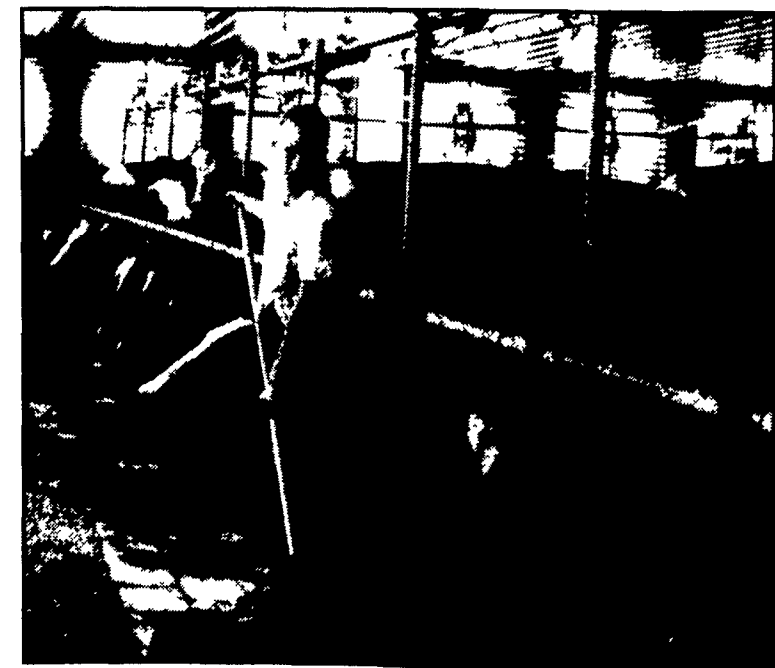
When people asked the Hornings why they have been able to achieve so much success including a high rolling herd average, they said, "We are trying to do the best we can do, to make our steps count, to work together as a family, and to build long-term relationships with professionals that can help us live in accordance to our mission statement."



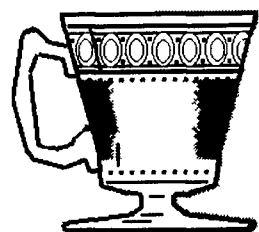
**Barns, kittens, and children are a natural combination.**



**Monica and Vanessa like caring for the calves on the family farm.**



**Destinee rises at 6 a.m. to hurry to the barn, where she'd rather be than any other place.**



**OMESTEAD**

**OTES**

