

Trust, Respect Key To Successful Farm Business Transfers

Harpster Family Shares Experiences At PDMP Meeting

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SPRUCE CREEK (Huntingdon Co.) — Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP) members gathered earlier this summer to hear both sides of the story from one family who is successfully passing on their dairy business to the younger generation.

The Harpster Family of Evergreen Farms, Inc., hosted the meeting and spoke about the challenges of “Trading Places — Planning For Both Generations.”

Parents Wayne and Marjorie Harpster are in the process of handing over management and, eventually, ownership of this 2002 “Dairy of Distinction” that includes a 2,000-cow herd and about 3,000 acres of land to sons Abe, Aaron, and Andy.

One of the keys to bringing the sons into the business is that they were given responsibility early on, according to Andy Harpster, the youngest of the three.

“From a young age, we were given small management decisions.” That included handling some of the finances, he said.

As an example of their parents’ trust, oldest son Abe recalled the time Wayne and Marjorie traveled to Africa for a month, leaving the entire farm and herd operation to himself, then 18, and brother Aaron, then 15.

The young brothers were on their own — they couldn’t even pick up the phone and call their parents for help if they needed it.

“They were in the bush,” Abe said.

The brothers came through that month in spite of some tough challenges, including the temporary loss of a harvest crew due to a conflict.



PDMP guests had a chance to tour Evergreen Farm facilities, including this 900-foot-long freestall barn, one of two such buildings needed to house the 2,000 milking cows.

Today, all three brothers are partners and shareholders in the operation. Abe is in charge of the milking cows; Aaron manages dry cows, newly fresh cows, and heifers; and Andy handles the crops.

“I think we have the best parents in the world as far as turning over the business and giving us responsibility,” Abe said.

According to Abe, it wasn’t always obvious the three brothers would become partners in the dairy. In fact, Abe began as a horticulture major at Penn State. Through his college years, however, “he began to see opportunities at home on the dairy,” he said.

Andy, a Cornell graduate, also considered other career options before deciding to join the family business. Aaron, another Penn State graduate, was the only one of the three who “everyone knew would be a farmer from the time he was little,” Andy said.

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Andy, left, and Abe Harpster tell stories of being entrusted with various responsibilities at an early age on Evergreen Farms.