

Milky Way Farm

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enough, in July 1976 the Milky Way dairy barn was destroyed by fire at the hands of a lightning bolt.

"We had to decide right quick whether or not to stay in business, because we needed milk the very next day," Lewis said.

To make a long story short, a neighbor came through, allowing the Seeley's to use his facility that had recently closed. "We trucked those cows right up there, and started hauling the milk back . . . there was no interruption in service to our customers."

Milky Way Farm survived a number of less tragic, though critical transitions. When people started bringing in plastic gallon jugs in the 1970s, they had to switch from being a "jugging" operation to a "bottling" plant in order to ensure quality. Previous-

ly, customers had been bringing glass jars or other "jugs" that could easily be sterilized — plastic changed all that.

But the most critical transition

was that of going from one family generation to the next.

"Kim always wanted to be out there with the cows, and when the time came, he was ready to go," Lewis said. And the Seeley patriarch is proud of how the third generation has pitched in. Sean is now studying agriculture

at Penn State, and Dane, 9, already runs his own chicken and egg business at Milky Way.

When asked about his customers, Lewis spoke clearly about their importance.

"People need to understand that every customer is an inspector," he said. He added that without a strong desire to greet and serve the public, he and Kim would never have kept going all these years.

Has it all been worthwhile?

"Marie is happy, and we raised a good family," Lewis said of his closest business partner. "She would never give up."

It was a natural decision to celebrate Milky Way's 40th anniversary by inviting friends, family, and neighbors to join.

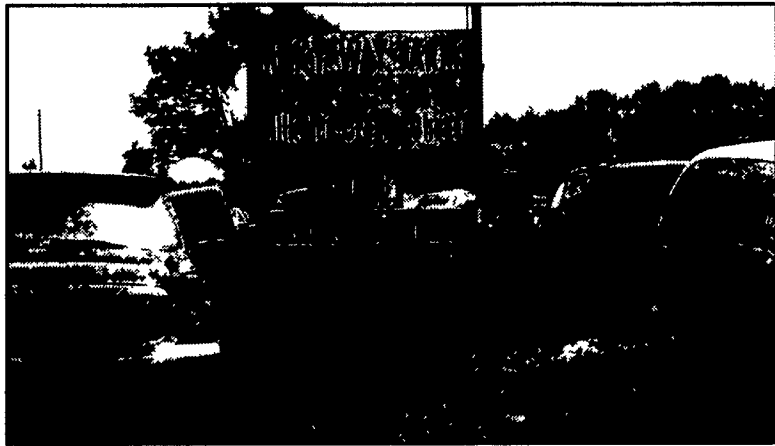
"We wanted to give something back," Lewis said. "It would be good if big companies did the same." Once again, the Seeleys' put their trust in the people who had sustained them all these

years — their customers.

Any predictions of a small turnout at the 40th anniversary celebration proved false. About 400-500 people passed through the line before the afternoon was over. There were hot dogs and sloppy Joes, grassfed cheese (the Seeley brand), a decorated anniversary cake and, of course, fresh milk and ice cream.

On that Fourth of July at Milky Way Farm, we celebrated the opportunity all of us should have in this country to make a decent living while serving our fellow citizens in as direct a manner as possible. Family farms, especially those that extend for generations in the same community, exemplify the greatest gift and opportunity that America has to offer.

Brian Snyder is executive director for the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA).



The sign shows the invitation, the parking lot shows the result.



The folks at Milky Way Farm are always looking for new ways to serve their customers. Here Kim Seeley shows their latest enterprise — pastured pork production.



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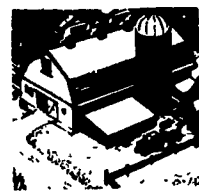


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