

Kids Korner

Summertime Chores Provide Learning Experiences, Fun



Robert, 13, prepares Fireball, a feisty red Holstein, for upcoming competition.



Kacie, 12, keeps her own garden plot weed-free.



Duane and Marilyn Hershey and their children, Steve, 17; Kelby, 15; Robert, 13; and Kacie, 12, stand in front of the "old barn", left, where 4-H projects are housed with the pregnant cows. Two years ago, the Hersheys expanded their milking herd of 65 cows to about 400 head.

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COCHRANVILLE (Chester Co.) — Not too many kids like to awaken at 3 a.m., but 12-year-old Kacie Hershey jumped out of bed at first call on July 2.

Her favorite cow had calved, her dad said. But he didn't tell her the most exciting news until she saw it for herself.

Not one, but two newborn calves lay in the hay. And, both were heifers, which jump started Kacie's growing herd numbers from three to five.

Estatic, Kacie promptly named the twins Marshmallow and Marble. "because they looked like that," Kacie said.

The birth of calves on the Hershey family's Ar-Joy Farm is certainly not an uncommon event. In the past 30 days, 52 calves were born to the milking herd, which numbers about 400 cows.

The difference is that the twin calves are Kacie's own responsibility and will be incorporated into her 4-H projects.

"I won't be able to show them this summer, but I will next year," Kacie said.

The wobbly twins are certain to be pampered and primped along with Kacie's two heifers Tomali and Penny, which will be entered in competition this year.

"I don't enter shows to win — I do it for fun," Kacie said.

Her 13-year-old brother Robert also raises 4-H animals for fun.

Robert has about six black and white Holstein heifers and a Red and White Holstein named Fireball.

Fireball lives up to the vision conjured by her name. Robert has been trying to tame Fireball's wild side so that she will walk calmly around the show ring during upcoming competition at Kimberton Fair and Chester County 4-H Roundup and district shows.



Twin heifers Marshmallow and Marble delighted Kacie with their birth the day this photo was taken. Although the twins are too young to compete this year, they will be honed for shows next year.

Halter leading is part of the training.

"I keep the halter tight so her head stays up and she walks close to me," Robert said. "The more we practice walking with them (show animals), the easier it is, and the tamer they become. The animals often get tamer as they get older."

Robert confided, "I like walking in the shows with the animals, but I don't like the practice."

Another requirement is fitting the animal, which requires cleaning and clipping the animals to groom them for appearance.

"I just learned how to clip the top and blend the hair in with the other hair," Kacie said of fitting her string of animals for showing.

She practices on non-show animals to perfect her clipping skills.

Audiences who watch shows are often unaware that exhibitors need to do much more than lead animals around the show ring.

"We need to know the name of the mother and father of the animals we are showing, the birth date, and other stuff," Kacie said.

Required, but not a favorite activity of Kacie and Robert are updating record books that chart details and expenses on each 4-H project.

Kacie and Robert are the children of Duane and Marilyn Hershey. They also have two older brothers, Steve, 17, and Kelby, 15.

Two years ago, the Hersheys expanded from milking 65 cows to 400.

It's a lot of work milking so many cows on the farm, so the family employs several Mexican workers for the actual milking, which frees Duane to manage the operation. Marilyn oversees the calf operation.

According to Marilyn, 4-H participation has really helped Kacie and Robert take pride in working with the calves, not just their own animals but the whole herd.

Robert bottle-feeds many of the calves. He is vice president of the the South Chester County Dairy Club. Kacie is treasurer.

"Chester County dairy families stick together to keep a dairy community. We don't want to see our numbers dwindle," Marilyn said.

Last year, dairy families resurrected a defunct Junior Holstein Club and saw the 4-H Dairy Bowl team advance to state competition.

Robert and Kacie are active in their church's junior high group. At school, Kacie is treasurer of the Bible Club and plays basketball and soccer. Robert participates in wrestling and track competitions.

Summer enables the Hershey family to have a more leisurely schedules, but when school starts, they will return to the schedule of Robert and Kelby helping in the barn from 6 a.m. to about 6:30 a.m. with calf care.

"If all three work together, it doesn't take so long," Marilyn said. "I stay longer to finish up, and I take care of the evening work when the children have sports activities. I think it is important that they are able to participate in a variety of events."

This summer, Kacie has her own garden in addition to helping in the family plot. Kacie is also in charge of feeding the 5-10 cats they keep on the farm.

Kacie wants to be a photographer when she grows up. Robert wants to try his hand at cartoon animation or woodworking. He'd also like to continue to help on the family farm, but not own it he said.

"Who knows?" he conceded. "I may change my mind."

In the interim, Kacie and Robert say they enjoy life on the farm.