



Corby & Melissa Werth

The Werth family's decision to expand their dairy's herd and facilities changed nearly everything they did on the farm, including how the cows are fed, housed, milked and cleaned up after.

The August 2001 herd and facility expansion significantly changed the day-to-day operations of the farm. Cows went from being milked and housed in a tie-stall barn to a milking parlor and freestall housing. A new manure pit was installed the next fall, with funding from the EQIP program. Formerly a scrape and haul operation, the farm now has liquid manure custom injected and spreads solids on fields twice a year, greatly reducing time and labor.

"We are glad we expanded, it is one of the best decisions we ever made," says Corby Werth, a partner in the family farm. "It is a lot better for the cows and much less labor intensive."

Corby and his wife, Melissa, are this year's District 12 OYDC. Corby farms with his younger brother, Cody, and their parents, Fred and Dorene. The family milks 130 cows and farms 500 acres in Alpena. The latest expansion coincided with Cody joining the dairy, to ensure the farm could produce enough income for three families.

When Corby joined the farm 10 years ago, his parents increased the herd from 48 to 70 cows, adding more tie stalls and eventually moving from rotational grazing to TMR feeding. The grazing fences were taken out and the land was planted with crops that now supply much of the cow's TMR.

"The tie stall and rotational grazing set up worked well with a small herd, but with more cows, it was hard to keep milk production up," Corby says.

In addition to keeping production levels up, the Werth's were also concerned about the transmission of Bovine Tuberculosis

(TB) to their cows from deer in the area. Alpena is located in the TB infected area of Michigan and the Werth's know area farmers who have experienced trouble with TB.

"We used to pasture a lot of heifers, but we don't do that now because of TB," Corby says.

TB has changed the way the farm operates, but the Werth family accepts it as just another challenge they have to deal with if they want to stay on the homestead.

"What's changed here is before TB, anytime we had extra heifers we would sell them," Corby says. "Now, with all the TB issues, our opportunity to sell heifers is zilch."

Yearly TB testing funded by the Michigan Department of Agriculture is also a point of stress on the farm.

"Every year we lose a couple days of sleep waiting for the test results to come back," Corby says.

If a cow is deemed a "suspect" during the TB testing, the Werths remove her immediately, accepting an indemnity payment from MDA. Removal of suspect cows right away prevents the herd from being placed under quarantine for a long period of time and allows the Werths to quickly go back to normal operations.

"I feel that we have been treated fairly by the state whenever we have needed to remove a TB suspected cow from the herd," Corby says.

With TB virtually eliminating the Werth's opportunity to sell heifers and cows out of the area, they focus less on pedigrees and registration of their cattle and more on milk production. Since the initial expansion, the herd's rolling average has increased by over 4,000 pounds of milk.

Corby keeps a close eye on milk production, tracking it daily as well as checking the MMPA Web site every few days for Somatic Cell and component information on the herd.

"We compile all of our records at the end of the year to do yearly comparisons," Corby says. "The information, such as a down slump in milk production, is used to make management decisions that will help us improve the herd during the next year."

Most of the herd is comprised of grade Holsteins, with a few registered Brown Swiss. The Werths feel strongly that bulls are unsafe and unpredictable, so all cows and heifers are AI bred.

"Cows on this farm have been AI bred for 40 years," Corby says. "There are so many things you can do to get the cows bred such as using Ovsynch and other techniques, there is no need to have a bull."

The veterinarian visits the farm regularly to perform pregnancy checks, but most other herd health issues and nutrition are handled by Corby.

"Dad and I do the breeding and I take care of most of the vet work and the hoof trimming," Corby says.

The current herd size allows the family to do all of the work themselves without hiring employees. In addition to herd health and nutrition, Corby does most milkings with Cody.

"Everybody does what needs to be done – we don't have any hired help," Corby says. "The whole family helps with the crops and cows."

Melissa works full time at the local hospital, but helps out on the weekends and evenings when she can. She also stays busy taking care of the couple's children, Annalee, 5 and Carson, 4.

"Working at the hospital works well for us," Melissa says. "It gives us additional income and medical benefits."

Corby and Melissa are members of the Hillman Local where Corby serves as vice president, a delegate of the local and an alternate on the MMPA Advisory Committee.



The Werth family: Corby, Melissa, Carson and Annalee.