



Bryce & Connie Kunding

Cow comfort is something all dairy farmers stress for their milking herd. But how much of a difference does it really make? According to this year's MMPA Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperator Runners-Up, Bryce and Connie Kunding, cow comfort can make a big difference to a dairy farm's bottom line.

During a recent remodel and expansion to the Kunding farm's freestall barn, cows that are normally housed there had to be moved to other areas of the farm. Housing the cows in close proximity without sand bedding caused the herd to have more cases of mastitis, an increase in SCC and lower production.

"We had to put the cows in pens in the old barn for about 3 weeks while we worked on the freestall barn," Bryce says. "We had to treat about 10 cows for mastitis, when we usually have very few cases. Production went down about 1,000 pounds a day. The cows weren't comfortable, they were standing on their feet a

lot and we had more feet and leg problems than usual."

Production has gone up, SCC has gone down and very few new cases of mastitis are occurring in the herd since the cows moved back into the freestall barn. The cows are even more comfortable than before, considering the Kundingers' added 25 additional stalls and raised the roof 4 feet for better ventilation.

Comfort has also increased for the people feeding the cows in the remodeled freestall barn.

"We changed the freestall barn from center row feeding to outside feeding," Bryce says. "We had used conveyors to feed the cows, but they were bad and breaking down a lot. It was quite costly to replace them, so now we feed the cows with new trailer type portable mixer."

Bryce says that with the amount of time and headaches spent working on broken down conveyors, the farm actually saves time and labor costs by feeding the cows with the new mixer.

Bryce farms in partnership with his two brothers, Bruce and Allan on the family's almost centennial (next year) dairy farm in Sebawaing. The brothers have worked together on the farm for most of their lives, helping their father out with the cows when they were growing up.

Today, the Kunding brothers share management responsibilities of the 155 cow dairy and 2,000 acre crop farm. Bryce manages the dairy herd and nutrition program.

Bryce aims to keep the cows healthy and works to achieve that goal in a number of ways. A vaccination program is in place on the farm, as well as regularly scheduled hoof trimmings and foot/hoof baths. Each month, the veterinarian performs a pregnancy and health check on the herd.

DHIA records that are kept on all cows helps Bryce make greater use of the NorthStar Select mating service when AI breeding the cows. The herd is AI bred most of the time, but during busy times,

Bryce runs a high quality bull with the herd.

A nutritionist visits the farm every two weeks to review and analyze the herd's feed. Separate rations are used for different cow groups to ensure maximum milk production and calving ease. Much of the feed – hay, corn and soybeans – are grown on the farm.

To keep fertilizer costs down and create an outlet for the dairy's manure production, the Kundingers have manure custom hauled from the dairy's manure pit to various fields on the 2,000 acre farm. Fields are nutrient tested each spring to ensure phosphorous levels are not too high.

"The custom hauler takes the manure to fields 3 to 4 miles away from the farm because the phosphorous levels were getting high in the fields near the farm," Bryce says.

Not every year is a record year for milk prices. To balance out the rough years and earn enough income to support three families, the Kunderinger brothers operate a diversified farm.

"We raise all of our bull calves," Bryce says. "They stay here until they are about 400 pounds and are moved to another barn off site to finish them out. We sell about 150 a year, mostly through the local stockyard."

In addition to dairying, the Kunderinger farm grows cash crops, including sugar beets, wheat, corn and various types of dry beans.

Bryce and Connie's four children, Daniel, 15, Katie, 13, Derek, 12, and Kelli, 9, help out on the farm during the summer and after school. Now that they are older, they have more responsibilities on the farm, but are also very busy in school activities and sports.

"We want them to help on the farm but we don't want them to miss out on the fun stuff," Bryce says. "They are involved in sports and we want them to have time to be with their friends."

The farm's future depends on what the Kunderinger kids want to do when they get older. Currently, they enjoy helping out on the farm, milking the cows and doing other chores. All of the kids say they like dairy farming, but are not sure what they want to do when they grow up.

Connie works full time off the farm for the local school district, so she does not have much time to spend helping on the farm. Her strong commitment to dairy farming is reflected in the education and promotion efforts she is involved in as an MMPA Dairy Communicator.

"I enjoy working at the milk booth at the sugar festival and the county fair," Connie says.

Bryce is also involved in MMPA activities, serving as the West Huron Local vice-chairman and a delegate.



"MMPA is a good place to market our milk," Bryce says. "Having involvement in MMPA allows you to see what's going on in the cooperative."

The Kundingers represented MMPA District 8 at the recent OYDC conference in Novi. Part of their duties as 2004 OYDC Runners-up includes representing MMPA at the National Milk Producers Federation Annual Meeting later this month with 2004 OYDC Jeff and Lynda Horning and the 2003 OYDC Dennis and Sara Johnson.

All of the OYDCs that attended MMPA's OYDC conference will be recognized at MMPA's Annual Meeting in March.



The Kunderinger family: Daniel, Kelli, Bryce, Derek, Connie and Katie.