



## Wayne & Margie Webster

Successfully running an expanding dairy operation while keeping a hands-on small farm attitude differentiates Wayne and Margie Webster from other mid to large dairy owners.

"This dairy is a bit different from others," says Margie. "We try to function like a mom and pop dairy. That's why we are so involved in the day to day operations."

Wayne and Margie are this year's MMPA District 6 OYDC. Wayne and his father, Larry are partners in their family dairy farm, Webster Ridge Dairy.

From the time he started working full-time on the dairy, Wayne, a fourth generation dairy farmer, has maintained a hands-on approach. When he joined the farm in 1982, he was the herdsman for the dairy's 300 cows, in addition to performing other duties on the dairy and crop portions of the farm. He maintained his herdsman duties through various expansions – feeding, treating, breeding and managing up to 750

cows each day. He had help from employees, but did the majority of the work himself.

"We finally hired our herdsman, Glenn Tucker, about a year ago," Wayne says. "We didn't hire a herdsman until we hit 750 cows."

Within the past year, the Webster Ridge herd has grown with internal replacements to 900 cows, making everyone pleased with the decision to hire Glenn.

"My dad is looking toward retirement and with that many cows, I could not spend as much time with the cows as I needed to," Wayne says. "Instead of having a few cows in heat a week, yesterday we had 51."

Even with a herd of 900 cows and growing management responsibilities, you won't find Wayne sitting behind his desk in the farm office. It is more common to see him in the barn checking cows or driving a tractor.

"I take an active role in breeding, cropping, putting up feed and

doing pretty much everything but feeding," Wayne says.

While Wayne likes having a hands-on approach on the farm, he realizes the farm's size makes it impossible for him to be everywhere at all times. Webster Ridge Dairy employs 15 full time and 3 part time employees with specific duties on all areas of the farm.

"You have to be willing to trust the people you have hired," Wayne says. "If you try to do everything yourself, you just can't do it."

Working on the farm everyday gives the Websters' an opportunity to personally know their employees. In lieu of formal, scheduled employee meetings, the Websters' opt for informal ones as needed. The use of Nextel phones has also reduced the need for employee meetings. Most of the employees have farm issued Nextel phones so they can quickly reach anyone on the farm and offer suggestions for changing methods if needed.

"We are very open minded around here," Margie says. "We

tell everyone if they have an idea, let's discuss it."

Good relationships with the staff help make things run smoothly at Webster Ridge. The Websters work side-by-side with their employees and can be found socializing with them after a long day of work.

"We value the work our employees do on the farm, so we like to do special things for them," Margie says.

Running the dairy with a mom and pop attitude works well in most areas of the farm, but with the quantity of manure 900 cows produce, the Websters are forced to think like a big dairy when it comes to environmental regulations.

"Environmental regulations have been a challenge for us," Margie says. "We try to take a proactive approach to the ever changing interpretations of environmental regulations."

Webster Ridge Dairy closely follows the farm's Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). The farm has two cement pits and two earthen pits for manure storage. The pits are cleaned out a couple times each year and their contents are spread or irrigated on the farm's 1,500 acres, as spelled out in the CNMP.

Margie's degree from MSU in Agricultural and Natural Resources Communications came in handy when dealing with all of the paperwork that is involved creating a CNMP and working towards Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) qualification for a large dairy operation.

With their CNMP complete, the Websters have also completed their MAEAP qualifications. Some of the environmental assurances

the farm has in place include grass barriers around the lots and separate catch basins for silage and manure runoff.

Webster Ridge Dairy has reached the size that would require the farm to seek approval from the county if they wanted to undergo any large expansions. For now, Wayne and Margie are content with the current herd size and say space limitations currently restrict them from expanding further.

"In the next five years we plan to build a new dry / fresh cow facility and we would like to add a heifer barn and a transition barn," Wayne says.

The new facilities will house the current herd, not make space for another herd expansion. A recent 40 percent heifer ratio has given the Websters' a windfall of new replacements that need a place to live.



Wayne and Margie are members of the Mid-Michigan Local, where Margie serves as an MMPA Dairy Communicator. She holds many dairy and agriculture related positions in the community. She is a Clinton County Farm Bureau director and an appointed member of the Dairy Diplomats and Michigan Farm Bureau Dairy Advisory Committee. She also serves as vice-president of the Eureka School PTO. The couple has two sons, Kelvin, 10 and Justin, 7.



*The Webster family: Margie, Justin, Wayne and Kelvin.*