

All in the Family

The Westendorps work hard and play hard to produce top-quality milk

When Doug Westendorp decided to switch from twice a day to three times a day milking, his reasons were like many other producers: to increase production and to free up time in the evening for his children's sporting events. The one outcome he did not expect was the immediate drop in the somatic cell counts.

"We saw the somatic cell count levels drop almost in half in just three days after we switched to three-times-a-day milking," Doug says. "That was a nice surprise for us because we didn't expect to see it change so quickly."

The increased production, coupled with the better quality levels (which generated more quality premiums), made adding another milking a profitable decision. It also helped them to be named the top quality producer for Michigan Milk Producers Association. The Westendorps were recognized as the top quality farm among the 1,700 MMPA member farms in the association at the MMPA annual meeting in March.

To be eligible for the award, a producer must meet all three quality premium levels, every month of the year. The farm with the best quality levels among all the eligible farms is named the MMPA Top Quality producer. The Westendorps quality levels for 2004 were: somatic cell count 68,917,



Doug and Louisa Westendorp along with their six children are the MMPA top quality award winners. Pictured (l-r) on top: Tina, Brittany, Levi. Bottom (l-r): Doug, Troy, Carlyle, Eric and Louisa.

PI count of 1,667 and raw bacteria count of 1,083.

Prior to receiving the MMPA award, the Westendorps were also named one of seven platinum level quality farms in the country by the National Mastitis Council.

Of course, as any producer can testify, it takes more than one change in milking schedules to generate top-level quality production. The change in milking times was just the latest in a succession of tweaks and changes to the overall management of the farm.

Over the past years, the Westendorps have fine-tuned their milking routine and made adjustments when necessary. Doug, Louisa and their six children do most of the milking so they are able to establish a protocol and stick with it.

"Everybody's been trained by dad," stresses Brittany.

The milking procedure is quite precise, down to the length of time between prepping animals. "We prep two cows at a time, starting with a dry wipe, then we use a foaming iodine pre-dip, strip each teat five times and then dry wipe before putting on the milker," says Carlyle the oldest of the Westendorp children. "We are adamant that the post-dip is on as soon as the milkers come off."

The timing is now to the point that it takes a minute and a half from the first wipe to the time the machine is put on.

"If we try to prep more than two at a time it takes too long to get back and put the machine on," Carlyle adds. "Plus it only shaves 5-10 minutes off the total milking time."

The family knows that Doug is not afraid of change and because he does a lot of reading they have come to expect new things.

"Even when we think things are going pretty well, Dad will say, 'hey, lets try this'," says Carlyle. "He is always wanting us to do better and to try new things."

Although they know the milking procedure is critical to producing high quality milk, the Westendorps believe that keeping cows and stalls clean and adding shavings to alleyways is the most important aspect to producing clean milk.

"We work to produce clean milk, and that can only come from clean cows," Louisa says.

Doug and Louisa have been risk-takers in the dairy business since their start in the early 1990s. After leaving a family operation, they moved to their Nashville farm with only a few pieces of equipment, 30 cows and six children under the age of six including a set of six-month-old triplets.

Through lots of hard work and determination they have built a respectable herd of 90 dairy cows with a rolling herd average over 30,000 pounds of milk. And all their children are a part of the day-to-day operations of the farm, each with their own animals and responsibilities.

"Doug is a very determined and a hard-working person," Louisa says. "He is not afraid to try something new and to make changes."

Three years ago the Westendorps took a "break" from dairying to refocus on their family and their farm. In February 2002, they sold all their milk cows to another farmer, keeping their youngstock. Not having cows to milk twice a day allowed them to take a couple



Located on a busy state highway, the Westendorps know the importance of keeping a neat and clean farm when promoting dairy products. Clean cows and bedding are key to their high-quality milk production.

family vacations and to complete some needed repairs around the farm.

"People told us once we sold the cows we would never want to go back to milking," Doug said. "But we were able to come back at it with new energy and focus after taking a 6-month break."

During their milking "break" they worked to make repairs that were needed and updated some of the facilities including the construction of a new dry cow barn.

They were also able to reinvest in better, younger cows.

"We bought about 40 new heifers when we started milking again," Louisa said. "We were able to buy some decent animals that improved our herd."

The latest adventure the Westendorps are embarking on is building an on-farm creamery to bottle milk and make cheese and ice cream. They hope to have "MOO-ville Creamery" operating by the end of May.

Fast Facts

>> Westvale-Vu Dairy consists of 90 registered Holsteins - their quality levels are:

SCC – 68,917

PI bacteria – 1,667

Raw bacteria – 1,083

>> The Westendorps are MMPA's 2004 Top Quality Award Winners. They were also named Platinum level quality winners by the National Mastitis Council.

>> Their secret? Clean cows and bedding, a precise milking procedure, three-times-a-day milking and consistent milkers.