

self sufficient

District 7 OYDC Eric and Amy Bergdolt own and operate their 75 cow dairy farm with very little outside help



Owning and operating your own 75-cow dairy farm while raising 5 young children may seem like a daunting task to some, but for MMPA District 7 OYDC Eric and Amy Bergdolt it is just another day on the farm.

Eric is the third generation of his family to own and operate the Vassar area dairy farm. His perseverance to farm and work ethic replicate those of his grandmother who was determined to keep the farm as a young woman following her first husband's death.

"My grandma and her first husband had just bought this farm then he came down with strep throat and died," Eric explains of his family's history. Determined to keep the farm, his grandmother did all the farm work and soon married Eric's grandfather.

According to Eric, dairy cows have always been a part of the family farm. When Eric enrolled in the Ag Tech program at Michigan State University, his father sold the milk cows but kept the young heifers. Eric left MSU after 1 year of schooling, about the time the heifers were ready to freshen. Along with a few purchased cows, Eric and his father were soon milking 22 cows.

Today, Eric milks 65 cows. He began expanding the herd after purchasing the 250 acre farm and homestead from his father in 1998.

"We hope to expand the herd even more – we could milk 100 cows with our current set-up," Eric says. "My dad only milked 35, but in order to support our family, we had to milk more cows. How far we expand depends on how interested the kids are in dairy farming."

Eric and Amy like raising their 5 children on the farm. The oldest 3 have 4-H animals and are expected to take care of those animals each day. They occasionally help Eric milk, too.

“The older three kids each have their own pen that they have to clean each day,” Amy says. “They lay down straw and feed and water the calves. They have to do everything except haul the manure to the fields.”

The purchase of the farm and homestead combined with ongoing farm improvements gave the Bergdolts a large debt load, so the couple focuses on keeping costs low wherever they can. The parlor was originally set up as a swinging-4. Converting it to a double-4 was relatively simple and more cost effective than building a new parlor. A hoop barn was erected to house the expanding herd, and a bunker silo and an upright silo were added to store feed.

“The hoop barn has no feed alleys,” Eric says. “We just needed freestalls, and wanted to do it as cheap as possible. Having feed alleys would have cost a lot more.”

In the warmer months, cows are on pasture for at least half of the day. Even in the winter, Eric sends them out of the barn when he is scraping so the cows can get some exercise.

Cows are fed forages from a feed wagon year-round. Grains are fed in the parlor. Eric likes the simple feeding system because it allows him to choose what he wants to feed when he wants to feed it. With the feed wagon, he is able to combine several forages of his choice to mix in the wagon.

Eric grows most of the forages on the farm and purchases sugar beet pulp and distillers grain to help stretch out the corn silage. Other than an occasional swap of hours or equipment with some neighboring farmers, all of the farm work is Eric’s responsibility.

“I grew up dairy farming and loved it, so that’s why I’m doing it,” Eric says. “I’ve still got that love for farming – it gets into your blood, and it’s a nice living.”

Amy keeps busy tending to the kids and doing the farm’s bookkeeping. She is currently working toward an associate’s degree in business management and is able to apply much of what she has learned when doing the bookkeeping. Amy is confident that her education will help them to run the farm business more effectively.

“We want to continue improving the farm so it is not so rough on Eric and all of us,” Amy says. “We want to make it easier for the fourth generation.”

A closer Look



Bergdolt Dairy Farm

Eric and Amy Bergdolt with their children: Ashley, 11, Jessica, 10, and Christina Lockwood, 8; Emma, 3 and Michael Bergdolt, 1.

Location: Vassar, Michigan

MMPA Members of: MMPA District 7 and the Vassar Local

Herd Size: 75 milking and dry

Replacements: 70

Acreage Farmed: 250

Milking set-up: Double-4 Herringbone Parlor

Agriculture and dairy involvement:

Eric is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Vassar Local and has also served as a delegate for the local. Amy is a 4-H volunteer at the Tuscola County Fair.

The thing that makes a difference on

our farm is: Our farm is a third generation farm, family owned and operated. With the Lord’s guidance, it will continue on to the fourth generation.