



Christina Powell

Starting your own farm takes hard work, time, patience and money. District 4 OYDC Christina Powell is experiencing this process first-hand while she and her fiancé, John Lehman, work to set up their own dairy farm in Elsie.

"We are setting up a dairy on John's farm," Christina says. "We are currently in the process of buying used equipment for the parlor."

Setting up a dairy is expensive, so the couple chose to remain patient and save money by collecting used parlor components at sales and through word of mouth.

"We purchased a used double-four parlor from our loan officer, our vacuum pump came from MSU surplus and the pipeline and units are from a farm sale in the Fowler area," Christina says. "We already have a bulk tank, so the

next step is to start building a pit parlor."

Christina hopes to begin construction of the parlor this spring. The couple plans to retrofit an existing barn to accommodate their needs.

"We are putting in a single five to start because we will be housing the cows on the other side of the wall," Christina says. "We are trying to utilize as much of the existing barn as possible to keep costs down. Our plan is to start shipping milk from our farm within a year."

The couple feels their plan will work, particularly since they have enlisted the help of John's brother, MMPA Member Representative Steve Lehman, to help them plan the parlor and facilities.

"I firmly believe there's a place in the market for a small to moderate size farm, but as with

any small business, it can only be successful if costs are controlled and a quality product is produced," John says.

Christina, a fourth generation dairy farmer, already has a small herd of her own milk cows that are currently being housed at her family's farm in Williamston. Her parents, MMPA members John and Lynn Powell, share a portion of their milk check with Christina based on the number of cows she owns within their herd. In return, Christina also works on the farm on the weekends and provides some feed for the cows.

"Since 1916, the Powell family has shipped milk with MMPA and we're pleased that Christina is carrying on that tradition," say Christina's parents.

"I plan to take my own herd and will probably lease some cows from my dad until he retires and I

can buy his herd," Christina says. "Otherwise, we do not plan to buy any animals, it is just too expensive. We plan to raise all of our young stock and hope to move our current young stock to Elsie this spring."

The majority of Christina's cows are registered Red and Whites, which is fitting, considering she is the current president of the Michigan Red and White Dairy Cattle Association. Most of her family's herd is also comprised of Red and Whites, a heritage Christina is proud of and wants to continue on her new farm.

"There are cow families in my parents herd that I want to keep going," Christina says. "We have one family that is almost 15 years old. Longevity is the main trait we are trying to breed back into the herd but we also breed for good blood lines and good characteristics. I don't believe in having a cow around for only a couple years and getting rid of her."

When the family ran into some problems with some of their Red and Whites breeding back, a semen salesman suggested trying some American Linebacker semen. The cows bred back and the Powells were so pleased with the results that they added a few Linebackers to their herd. A couple of the cows Christina will take to her new farm are Linebackers. She plans to register them when that option is available.

"The Linebacker semen really helps with hard breeders," Christina says. "The American

Linebacker is a tri-purpose breed used as dairy, oxen or beef cows. They have some Holstein in them and do milk like a Holstein, but their components are higher than a Holstein's."

When Christina and John finally move the cows to their new dairy, they say they do not want to expand the herd beyond 50 cows.

"We want to keep it between 40 and 50 cows at most to keep it small so we won't need to have a lot of hired labor," Christina says. "I would rather have family working on the farm or just do my own work."

In addition to dairy farming, John and Christina grow a variety of crops, some are and will be used to feed the cows and the rest are grown as cash crops. The couple markets their excess crops through the feed mill John owns, Carland Elevator Inc. in Elsie.

Both John and Christina currently work full time at the elevator, something Christina hopes to change once the cows have moved to the new farm.

"I am going to want to spend more time with the cows so we will probably hire an employee for the elevator," Christina says.

Christina is a member of MM-PA's Ingham County Local where she serves as a Dairy Communicator and a Delegate. She has also served on the board of directors of the Williamston Lions Club for the past 7 years.



Christina and her parents, John and Lynn Powell.