

First-Hand Experience

A taste of politics and government employment after college made District 1 OYDC Brian & Carrie Preston comfortable with their decision to return to the family farm



The only way to know if you would really like a certain job or lifestyle is to live it first hand. Growing up, Brian Preston thought politics might be an interesting profession to get in to, so he worked as an aide for a campaigning state representative after graduating from college.

“Working on a campaign is intense,” Brian says. “It was a great experience but I soon realized that I couldn’t do that my entire life. There’s a big difference between working long hours in your own business and working long hours for someone else.”

Brian graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Agri-Business from Michigan State University in 2000. After experiencing the political realm, he decided to take a position with the Michigan Department of Agriculture as an International Market Specialist. While there, he had the opportunity to work with all aspects of Michigan agriculture, learning about more than just dairy farming.

“My time at MDA helped me to develop contacts within the agriculture industry across the state,” Brian says. “I always knew I wanted to come home, but my experiences working away from the farm helped me to bring a different perspective back to the farm.”

In 2003, Brian and his wife, Carrie, were contemplating moving back to his family’s Quincy area farm. Around the same time, Carrie was offered a position as the Agriculture and Natural Resources teacher in nearby Coldwater, where she now teaches students about agriculture on an actual working farm.

Soon after, Brian became the fourth generation of Preston descen-

dants to join the family's dairy and hog farm. In order for Brian to become a farm partner alongside his father, Keith; uncle, Glenn; and grandfather, Stanley, the Prestons had to find a way to generate additional income. They chose to expand their dairy herd from 80 cows to the current 220.

"The family did strategic planning and a lot of analysis before just going ahead with the expansion," Carrie explains.

The Prestons have always trusted the advice of their MSU Extension agents, so they turned to their local dairy agent for assistance in planning the initial expansion.

"Grandpa always worked well with the local extension agents and we have been fortunate to have really good dairy and ag-business agents in this area," Brian says.

While going over the plans to update buildings and increase herd size, the dairy extension agent also suggested a few cow management changes for the Prestons to consider.

"One of the first things we did was switch to sand bedding," Brian says. "We also started using rBST and added Ovsynch to our breeding program. The cows have really taken off since implementing her suggestions."

The farm's buildings and parlor were also upgraded at the time. The parlor was outfitted to accommodate future increases in herd size, with the knowledge that other young family members may want to join the operation. As it turns out, Brian's cousin Adam, is in his final year of the Ag Tech program at MSU and plans to work his way into the family business following graduation.

"We are very much in the beginning stages of another expansion, and still trying to figure out what is the right number of cows – 350? 450?" Brian says. "Our parlor and bulk tank are set up for 700 cows, but it will be a long time before we get there."

Their parlor may be sufficient, but additional housing will need to be erected when more cows are added to the herd. Brian estimates they will break ground on a new freestall barn in the near future.

The importance of family relationships has always been emphasized in the Preston family, which is why the current farm partners openly and willingly find a way to include the next generation in the farming operation.

"Family and cows are the two most important things on our farm," Brian says. "We work very well together and depend on each other."

The farm's emphasis on family also translates to an understanding that farm partners need time to spend with their spouses, something Brian and Carrie appreciate. When they are not working, the couple enjoys showing Belgian draft horses they own.

A closer Look



Preston Dairy Farm Brian & Carrie Preston

Location: Quincy, Michigan

MMPA Members of: MMPA District 1 and the Hillsdale-Litchfield Local

Herd Size: 220 milking and dry

Replacements: 160

Acres Farmed: 540

Milking set-up: Double-10 Parlor

Agriculture and dairy involvement:

Brian is a current Michigan Farm Bureau ProFILE program participant. The couple serves as Membership co-chairs for the Branch County Farm Bureau where Carrie also serves on the Project Red Committee. Carrie is a member of the Michigan Association of Ag Educators Strategic Planning Committee.

The thing that makes a difference on

our farm is: We work very well together as a family. We depend on each other and place emphasis on being a family first.