

# Willing to Change

*When District 10 OYDC Laura Daniels began managing her family's dairy herd, she organized and carried out a successful switch from two times to three times a day milking.*



When Laura Daniels returned from a trip visiting her sister, Jenny, who was a herd manager for a 1,600-cow dairy in New York State, Laura came home with several ideas to improve her family's Whittimore-area dairy farm. One of the biggest changes Laura suggested was to switch from two to three times a day milking, a concept her father, MMPA Board Member Rodney Daniels, had considered, but not yet put in to place.

Laura had noticed the cows were leaking milk in the holding pen. That, coupled with what she had observed at the New York dairy farm, made her believe the cows could benefit from an additional daily milking.

"When Laura came back to the farm and told Rod we needed to start milking three times a day, he told her she could be in charge of doing it and she organized the whole thing," says Anne Daniels, Laura's mother.

Laura and Rodney work together at WRL Daniels Dairy Farm, owned by Rodney and his brothers, Wallace and Lynn, whose sons, Chris and Luke, also work on the farm. Rodney and Laura's main duties include management of the cows and the employees milking them.

Although Rodney thought three times a day milking might be beneficial to the cows and the farm's bottom line, he was concerned about the extra time, effort and employee issues that might surface. Instead of saying "no," he put Laura in charge of making the switch, which thrust her into employee management along with her cow duties.

"I am trying hard to avoid some of the problems I had with my father," Rodney says. "So I let her make her own decisions, her own mistakes. I don't actually think I've ever said 'no, you can't do that.' I've expressed concern, but never said 'no.'"

~ WRL Daniels Dairy Farm ~

At nearly the same time Laura switched the cows to three times a day milking, Rodney became ill. Laura took on even more duties, becoming the farm's main herd manager.

Through all the stress of the additional responsibility on her shoulders, Laura thrived, her parents say, and she worked hard to stick to her plans and the new milking schedule. The three times a day milking has proved successful for the farm, and Rodney says the cows are averaging about 93 pounds per day in milk production -- up about 15 pounds per cow per day from previous production levels.

The additional milking time meant employees working more hours, more wear and tear on the parlor, and the chance that a family member might not always be performing every milking. After employees made potentially costly errors, Laura began finding ways to make the parlor easier to use. For instance, the parlor can no longer be turned on unless the cooler is on and the pipe is in the tank. She also makes sure there are always two people milking, and expects them to work as a team, telling them both are responsible to ensure all milking-related duties are completed.

"I tell them 'If you are working as a team, then both of you need to make sure everything is done,'" Laura says. "Both of them get in trouble if the stuff doesn't get done."

Since Laura has taken over most of the herd responsibilities, the farm's cull rate has dropped from 37 to 29 percent. The family attributes that to several management changes Laura put in place to improve herd health. In addition to three times a day milking, she also took a look at the herd's overall foot health, which needed improvement. Laura now has a hoof trimmer come out every two weeks to take care of the milking herd and has the heifers trimmed before they calve, which, the family says, makes a real difference in their future hoof health.

"This farm hasn't missed a beat since she took over -- the cows are milking just as well as when Rod was managing them," Anne says. "She's been a godsend around here."



Laura with her cousins Chris and Luke

*One Thing that Makes a  
Difference on Our Farm is...*

Our willingness to change.

~ MMPA Member of ~  
District 10  
Sunrise Local

~ Herd size ~  
300 milking and dry

~ Replacements ~  
200

~ Acres Farmed ~  
1,210

~ Milking Set-Up ~  
Double-9 herringbone parlor

~ Ag and Dairy Involvement ~  
*Laura attends a young dairy farmer  
group once a month.*