

Making it Work

2009 MMPA District 10 OYDC Mark and Karen Curry

At Curry Farms, each member of the farm management team has his or her own unique talents and abilities, which allow them to run a successful family farming operation.

The farm has been in the Curry family since 1868. Mark's Grandfather, Waldo, introduced the dairy portion of the farm in 1939 with 12 cows. By 1949, Waldo had registered the cows and became one of the first farmers in the area to utilize DHIA testing.

Mark and his brother Eric, are

currently working toward a farm transfer from their father, Robert, who took over the farm from Waldo in 1980. Once the farm transfer is complete, Mark and Eric plan to operate the farm in partnership as an LLC.

Mark's wife, Karen came to the farm in 1995 as an intern through MSU's Dairy Management Program. At the time, Mark was an employee of the farm and the couple began dating. Karen returned to the farm after graduating in 1996.

In 1997, the couple left Mark's family farm and moved to Clinton County, where Karen was employed at an Ionia County dairy farm and Mark at a beef farm and two other dairy farms. Mark and Karen were married in 1999. In 2002, the pair moved back to Mark's family farm where they were able to put Karen's dairy education along with experience they both gained working on other larger dairy farms to practice.

"When we moved back, we focused on herd health and tweaked the cow nutrition program," Mark says. "They were put on a mineral program and that made a difference."

The Currys also helped build a new parlor, which they started in the winter of 2002 and completed in June 2003. With a new parlor and different herd health and nutrition program, the cows on the farm were thriving. Unfortunately, the cow health they had worked so hard to improve would soon face a serious challenge: e.coli mastitis.

"In 2005 we started having e.coli mastitis problems with the cows," Karen says. "We changed dips, cow prep procedures, changed the mats in the barn and dusted everything with lime. In all, 20 cows came down with e.coli mastitis."

"Of those 20 cows, a third went in a hole, a third went to slaughter and we were able to save a third," Mark says.

Soon after the discovery, the Currys began administering the J-Vac mastitis vaccine to the herd. The pair says the vaccine, coupled with changes made in the parlor and barn, as well as constantly dusting the cow areas with lime, did eventually reduce the rate of new e.coli mastitis infections.

"We're finally back to where we needed to be," Karen says.

This April, the farm managers felt herd numbers and herd health were at satisfactory levels in order to start three times a day milking. At that time, the Currys also decided to ship cows that didn't make the grade.

"We shipped the cows that just weren't giving us the production—



Top: Third generation dairy farmers, brothers Eric and Mark Curry.

Bottom: Mark and Karen Curry, with their daughter, Amanda, 6.

the open, fat cows—in March and April,” Mark says.

While many challenges are behind the Currys, the couple says there’s always room for improvement. The Currys’ cows have an unusually high twin ratio of 10 percent. Karen is still researching why this is occurring, but feels it may be due to too much energy. The couple says they would like to see a large reduction in the twin rate, because the farm is down about 15 cows and the Currys also market heifers.

“We sell approximately 20 animals per year,” Mark says. “Bred heifers—mostly springers, but sometimes yearlings.”

Although the Currys have faced many challenges over the past decade, the couple remains optimistic about the future of their farm and dairy farming in general.

“In 2009, we were plagued with low milk prices, too many twins and injuries,” Karen says. “In 2010, it’s all going to turn around. That’s going to be our year.”



Curry Farm Facts:

MMPA Members of:

District 10 and the Sunrise Local

Herd size: 186 milking and dry; 153 replacements

Acres farmed: 630

Milking set-up: Double-10 parallel parlor

Ag and community involvement: Karen is a delegate for the Sunrise Local. She serves on the Iosco County Farm Bureau board of directors and the Promotion and Education committee. Mark is a director for the local DHI.

“One thing that makes a difference on our farm is... We each have our own unique talents and abilities that allow us to work together toward the ultimate goal of a successful farming operation.”