

From Beginning to End

As a young child I grew up on a 50 cow farm of a registered Holstein herd in a small Wisconsin community. At the time, I wasn't able to comprehend who all came into contact with our family and how their part plays into the everyday functions of the farm. Such as the daily milk pick-ups by the milk hauler, to the vet coming to do herd health or to a late night unexpected call of a cow trying to deliver a live, healthy calf, to the feed man making his deliveries of grains and the list goes on. These people as I would learn would play a key role in how one determines what the next step is to make sure success comes their way in the daily life of a farmer. And we all know in the world of farming success isn't a given by any means.

Growing up we were members of the local 4-H club and were involved in activities. The month of August meant it was our time to show off our talents with our animals, crafts and crops at the fair. We would work extra hard with our animals several weeks prior to the fair, prepping them for "show time." As we became older, we were members of the FFA organization. The values that each of these organizations possess not only helped us to build relationships with each other but with members of the agricultural community.

I knew someday that agriculture would play a part in our life; I just didn't know at the time the extent of how much. The opportunity arose about 15 years ago, that my husband and I decided to purchase a hobby farm a couple miles south of my family's farm. We exposed our children to raising steers and pigs which were shown at the local fair. In turn, they would learn a new respect for raising animals. Also with being FFA members, they would have to seek out bidders from local businesses; with the hope these bidders would purchase their animals at the market sale. Nothing makes a parent prouder than to see their child's hard work pay off in the end with a successful sale, a handshake and a Big Thank You to the buyer.

The other part of moving closer to the family farm was the opportunities that would come with being part of the farm atmosphere. My children learned how to feed baby calves, help with haying-which undoubtedly took place on the hottest day of every summer, they were taught how to drive a tractor and to go on a parts run if a piece of equipment broke down. Also they discovered that everyone plays an important role in the day to day operations of the farm.

It wasn't until this past November, how I realized one person can impact the dairy industry. My brother, who was a farmer, lost his life in an unfortunate hunting accident. He was only a farmer of one. He could depend upon family and friends to help out with milking and field work if needed. After his passing, my immediate family, a nephew and a couple of amazing friends helped us keep his dairy operation running until December 31, 2015. The young stock were hauled out late that afternoon and the milking cows in the early evening and moved to a sale barn for the dispersal of his herd that would take place on January 1, 2016. It was last of a lot of things... last calf to be fed, last cow to be milked, last time the pipeline would be used, last time for a milk pick up, last time the aisles would be scraped, and the barn doors would close for the last time. That's a big dose of reality that hits and hits pretty hard.

One just doesn't understand totally at the time how much one person's career choice can influence so many people and businesses. All the way from the milk hauler, veterinarian, feed man and DHIA milk tester just to name a few will no longer have a need to come out to the farm. The loss of a dairy herd is not only a direct loss to the immediate family but also a monetary loss to these companies and their employees that this farmer has built a direct and daily relationship with. These businesses will now need to see if they can market their service or products to another dairy farmer in the area to take his place. And with today's challenges taking place in the dairy industry, this will be one hard task to accomplish.

Dairy means a whole lot more to me than just cattle now days. I guess if you would have asked me " what Dairy means to me" when I was 8 years old, I would probably would have said our registered Holstein herd and told you my parent's registered dairy prefix name. But now the phrase has taken on a whole new

meaning. As I have learned it is an entire industry that revolves around many families and their careers. It means family and friends who support one another in a time of need no matter what the circumstance. The support of the local agricultural community came with overwhelming positive response in our situation. The impact and effect that it has left on my family is truly inspiring to say the least.

So if you get the chance, take the time to tell a farmer thank you. It may be because of that one person's desire and career choice in the dairy industry that will impact why you have a job to go to every day, pay your bills, and able to put a meal on your table.

I have been fortunate enough to be a part of and witness the profound and direct impact the dairy industry has to the agribusiness community—from beginning to the end.

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