

TIMELY TOPICS

By Julie Berry

# PRO-DAIRY supports planning for the future

Glenn and Emily Beller have seen a number of changes on their century old farm. One of the biggest has been the introduction of computers and the amount of data that is collected.

The Bellers use PRO-DAIRY and Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management supported programs Dairy Farm Business Summary (DFBS) and Dairy Profit Monitor (DPM) to make sense of it all.

The century farm started when Glenn's father bought nine cows from his father. Glenn went into partnership with his father in 1975 and married Emily in 1978. Their son Jon joined the now nearly 600-cow farm 11 years ago. His wife, Taren, is a school teacher.

"When we started farming we didn't have computers. On the information side it has been quite exciting. It cuts across all areas," Glenn said. He points to GPS use in harvest to data collection in the milking center. "We have a lot of data. A challenge to this is gathering information and getting it in a way so it can

**The Beller family in Carthage, NY uses analysis tools to support generational transfer and financial success.**

be kept. A lot of the data is historical. Unless you have a number of years of data you don't really see changes," Glenn said. "It's also helpful to look back when a problem does arise."

Benchmarking through DFBS, DPM and other programs has allowed the farm to compare itself against itself and to other farms to help identify potential areas of improvement. The farm family evaluates milk production, feed costs, veterinary costs, per cow and per hundredweight costs, cost of

raising heifers, and labor costs.

"Hands down it's helping you use all the information you have. It's important to compare benchmarks, to compare yourself to yourself, and to the top farms in the industry," Glenn said. "It really challenges you to see your farm as the business that it is."

One constant for the farm has been strategic growth, supported by advisory teams, Farm Credit and PRO-DAIRY's analysis tools. Back when they had 89 cows their veterinarian and herd consultant John Ferry had them begin envisioning and planning for their retirement. About that same time they made a "pivotal"



## THE MANAGER

decision to build a new freestall barn. More recently through an advisory team the farm family envisioned “what if” scenarios. Their planning paid off and when wished for land became available, and with the return of their son, they were poised for action. “We don’t want to be on the cutting edge of everything, but we also don’t want to be old and obsolete,” Glenn said. “Jon’s return supported a more aggressive approach.”

The advisory team has also supported generational transfer and each partner has separate and clear responsibilities. Jon manages the dairy and the workers, Glenn the crops and the feeders, and Emily the youngstock and bookwork.

The farm has grown so that Glenn and Emily no longer milk cows themselves, but still maintain hands-on management. “I used to do all the milkings,” Emily said. “The younger generation doesn’t want that lifestyle. It was a life change for us to have Sundays off and to have evenings off.”

“We’ve always had good luck and build relationships with employees. The employees have to enjoy what they’re doing, even if every job isn’t enjoyable,” Glenn said.

And, many of the positions require skilled labor, which often surprises legislators during tours held at the farm, he said. “It’s not unusual to operate a \$100,000 of equipment.” Glenn said. “There’s a responsibility that comes with that.”

Growing large enough to support hired labor has also meant that the farm family has more life balance and can occasionally leave the farm to attend meetings, conferences and participate in leadership programs. Five years ago, when the farm had 180 cows, they participated in PRO-DAIRY’s Cornell Dairy Executive Program (CDEP). Jon is a graduate of PRO-DAIRY’s Academy for Dairy Executives and in CDEP.

“We’ve met nice people and kept in contact,” Emily said. “We always come home with a few things we need to work on.”

They would like to travel more. And for this farm family that means incorporating stops to visit with other farmers and tour other farms. Because of their planning, this is possible. “The next step is to take it easier,” she said. “It’s a very rewarding occupation, especially to see grandchildren involved.” ■

## Dairy Acceleration Program: Additional Funding Opportunity

Additional funding from the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Department of Environmental Conservation has extended New York’s Dairy Acceleration Program.

This program is designed to enhance profitability and environmental stewardship of New York dairy farms. The program will be delivered in collaboration with Cornell PRO-DAIRY and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Funding for eligible projects may be used for organization of financial records and benchmarking, creation of strategic business plans, design of new or remodeled production facilities, development or updates of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) and design of Best Management Practices (BMPs) identified in the farm CNMP.

Dairy heifer operations are also eligible to apply for environmental planning funds.

### Basic program eligibility:

- Must be a dairy cattle farm located in New York shipping milk.
- Must have complete financial records for business planning.
- Must have a current CNMP if applying for funds to design BMPs.
- Preference is given to farms with under 300 cows.
- Must complete and submit an application.

### Environmental planning options:

- CNMP updates for farms under 300 cows.
- New CNMPs for farms under 300 cows.
- Design of BMPs for farms under 700 cows.

Dairy Acceleration Program funding covers 80% of a project’s cost. The farm is responsible for 20% of the project cost, which is paid directly to the service provider, including any in excess of established limits.

### Funding may include:

- Up to \$5,000 to develop a business plan for long term viability of the dairy.
- Up to \$2,500 for previously awarded farms to continue working with their farm business consultant in a subsequent year to refine their business plan.
- Up to \$1,000 to prepare farm financial records and benchmark current financial status in preparation for business planning.
- Up to \$6,000 to develop a new CNMP (farms under 300 mature cows).
- Up to \$4,500 to update an existing CNMP (less than 3 yrs old and farms under 300 mature cows).
- Up to \$5,000 for design of a single eligible BMP identified in the CNMP (farms under 700 mature cows).
- Up to \$10,000 for design of a combination of BMPs identified in the CNMP (farms under 700 mature cows).
- Up to \$2,500 for certification of existing manure storage.

### Eligible BMPs include:

- 561 Heavy Use Area (e.g. concrete barnyard)
- 367 Roofs and Covers (e.g. cover over a barnyard)
- 317 Composting Facility
- 316 Animal Mortality Facility
- 635 Vegetative Treatment Area
- 360 Waste Facility Closure
- 632 Waste Separation Facility
- 313 Waste Storage Facility
- 634 Waste Transfer
- 629 Waste Treatment

For more details, visit the DAP website at <http://pro dairy.cals.cornell.edu/dairy-acceleration> or email [dap@cornell.edu](mailto:dap@cornell.edu).