



The Wilkinson family is pictured here a year ago at their Getty Acres, Adams County, Pennsylvania, where they have a 240-cow dairy herd, about 165 replacement heifers and feed about 270 head of Holstein steers for beef. The diversified farm also has a feed hay and mulch hay business. Larry and Doris Wilkinson (seated center) are in partnership with sons Dan and Ed. Dan and Laurie (left) have two children Kendall (kneeling left) and Ty (kneeling right), who both help out around the farm. Ed and Tina have four children: Carl (far right) works full-time at the farm, Lee (not pictured) attends PennTech in Williamsport, Holly (fence left) is a senior in high school and works part time on the farm, and Heather (fence right) is a high school sophomore, who also helps part time on the farm. Beginning with the corn planting in the spring, the family has opened their farm to television viewers across many counties in Pennsylvania as WGAL Channel 8 News has been following the "regular day-to-day activities" of the farm in a special "growing season" series. Last week's edition focused on the dairy farm and the current economic climate for the dairy industry.

Wilkinson family is focus of news series

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

GETTYSBURG, Pa.—In the context of national and state issues affecting dairy farmers, indeed all farmers today, a question was raised at the 2010 Dairy Summit in February during a media panel which included Dan O'Donnell, news director for WGAL Channel 8 (based in Lancaster, York and Harrisburg). The question was: How do producers tell their story of "normal life on the farm?"

The Wilkinson family is having the opportunity to do just that as the focal point of a WGAL ongoing news series called "Growing Season." The first edition aired during corn planting and focused on the concept of a family farm.

Last week, the spotlight turned to the diversified Adams County farm's 240-cow dairy, where the camera crew followed Larry Wilkinson and his herd manager Eric Spence through the morning chores beginning at 4:30 a.m.

Wilkinson and Spence have been members of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP) for many years, and they've taken advantage of some of the educational programs and farm tours.

The opportunity to show people what farming is all about is not something they take lightly. But the entire five-minute spot (cut from five hours of taping), gave a fresh, honest, sincere view of real life on the farm.

From the WGAL anchors to the researchers and camera crew, it was obvious they did

their homework. The dairy-focused edition on July 1 weaved-in the current economic struggles of dairy farmers and portrayed a timely real-life view of Larry and Eric who have an obvious love for taking care of the cattle at Getty Acres.

"I didn't know what they wanted," Larry says of the experience. "They said 'just do the normal things that you do.'"

So for those five hours from 4:30 to 9:30 a.m., the camera man hopped in the truck with Larry as he went to get the cows, filmed the milking process as Eric explained cow behavior, cattle care, and the milking procedures, and then moved on to the calf pens, where Larry feeds 100 calves every morning.

"When I watched it on the television, I thought they did a very good job," Larry relates. "They just took it as it happened, and I think they deserve credit too because they did a real positive thing for the dairy farmers."

What came through in last Thursday's segment on the Getty Acres dairy was a caring and paternal attitude toward the cows and calves, but realistic at the same time. It really came through, just how much dairy producers get out of the simple daily things like the sunrise and calves being playful and ornery.

The whole piece was simple, straightforward, down-to-earth, and accurate. From Larry, to his sons and grandchildren on the cropping end, to Eric as the dairy manager, everyone involved appeared calm and sincere.

The economic situation of dairy farming today was referenced in the title: "Tough times for dairy farms," and it was mentioned

in the introduction by the news anchors. There were good graphics and information supplied by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, so the visual use of statistics had impact for the viewers, but were not overdone.

News reporter Jere Gish interviewed multiple generations, which was a real plus for viewers to gain perspective on what it takes to keep a multi-generation family farm going.

There were terrific shots of the cattle, and the milking parlor, while not fancy, was clean and well maintained.

Larry and his son Dan, in separate interviews, referenced the economic difficulties, and both pointed out that if they had only the dairy to rely on, it would be tough. Both noted that being diversified into dairy, crops and beef has helped them weather the tough times in agriculture.

"My friends kid me for my autograph," says Larry, "But I'm just a regular guy. We've been so busy, working late, the only people I've talked to about the television show are from church."

While being in the limelight is not the most comfortable place for most dairy farmers, Larry says the experience has been good.

"If we want to get the word out about how the dairy farmer really takes care of things and how rough the times are right now with the milk price, I would say this has been a good chance to show so many people more than what we can tell," he explains. "It's a good way to get the word out to other people about what's happening on the farm."

With children today being three and four generations removed from farming, the "or-

dinary, normal farm life message" is more important than ever before.

"It used to be that everyone knew how to milk a cow or feed a chicken," Larry reflects. "Times have changed with only one or two percent of us farming. I would tell people if you have a good opportunity to do something like this, take it. It's important to have a good working relationship with the news people that you can see how they do things."

Larry's son Dan is involved in the Adams County and Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, which has partnered on the "Growing Season" project with each television spot including a brief spot with Gary Swan of PFB.

The biggest thing, says Larry, is "just be yourself. Just the way it is every day. That's what they wanted to see."

Last Thursday's dairy-focused "Growing Season," ended with the calf chores as the sun climbed over the ridge.

"They're all waiting for their breakfast," said Larry. "They're like having a hundred little kids. And then there's these ones that just can't let their bucket alone for five minutes."

"Just one of the little obstacles a farmer faces, along with the big ones," Gish narrates. "But still..."

"This morning is really a nice morning to feed them, with the sun coming up and everything," Larry continues.

"The sun coming up and hours of work already done, here on the farm. In Adams County, Jere Gish, News-8."

To view the July 1 "Growing Season" visit: <http://www.wgal.com/video/24116820/index.html>