

## Ohio News Watch

# Meet the Conservation Farm Families

## Rabers diversify farm interests

By TIM WHITE

**R**ED Hill Farms near Cambridge is about as diverse as any farm in the state. Managed as a trust, the farm includes a 120-cow dairy herd, a 500-cow/calf operation, a feedlot under construction to handle 500 feeders, more than 800 acres of corn and beans, more than 1,500 acres of pasture and about the same amount of hay.

So where does conservation fit in? "Everywhere," says Randy Raber, who manages the trust. "Conservation is an ever-evolving process. It's a better way to learn. An open mind can protect our environment and be more profitable."

Farming with his wife, Marijane, and sons Jonathon, Nathan, Casey and Peter Gravens, Raber finds a place for agriculture in a county that is becoming a home for oil shale and pipelines. "Any land that is moving now is being sold without the mineral rights," he says.

Raber began his farming career running the dairy after graduating from Ohio State's Agricultural Technical Institute. He started the beef herd as a way to put the farm's pastureland to use. Now the beef side of the operation has outgrown the dairy, and he relies on a full-time herdsman



**NEXT GEN:** Randy Raber (center) is working to build an operation that will have room for his sons. He is flanked by Jonathon (left) and Nathan. They help out on the farm, while younger son Casey is still in high school and Peter works off the farm.

to run the dairy operation. His sons help out with crops as well as beef. In addition, he and Marijane have recently opened a restaurant specializing in steaks, but also featuring seafood and high-quality dishes. You can read more about it on Page 66.

"By steadily expanding, we hope to create an opening for our boys to come back to the farm," he says. "You need to have a variety of options. If they choose to do something else that is fine, but this way we give them the opportunity to farm."

The dairy herd is Jersey. The beef cows are 90% Angus crossbred with Angus and Stabilizer bulls. The beef herd has two calving seasons to spread out work and

**T**HE diversity of the state of Ohio poses challenges that farmers meet with the best management practices suitable for their location. A tour of the 2013 Conservation Farm Family Award winners' farms showcases the unique approaches each of these families takes to meet the farming situation they face.

We are honored to join with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil and Water Conservation to present these winners to you. Each will receive a plaque provided by Hancor Corp., along with a check for \$400 provided by our other sponsor, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

Their names will be engraved on a brick and placed in the Conservation Walk of Fame at the Molly Caren Ag Center.

Please join us on Thursday, Sept. 19, at the Lawrence G. Vance Soil and Water Conservation Park at 11:30 a.m. to recognize the work of these farm families.

With many streams and ponds as well as nearly 2,000 acres of woodlots on the farm, improved fencing and watering has been critical. The farm has used the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to create a full rotational grazing system. They have built more than 20 miles of fencing. For water they have installed about 40 large tire troughs. The troughs are fed by some 5 miles of water lines. Water is pumped from the farm's multiple ponds with siphon pumps or flows from spring developments. The system enables them to move cattle once a week.

"Eventually, we would like to get to the point where we break up the pastures even more and move the cow-calf pairs even more often," Raber says.

In winter, the cattle are fed large round bales on heavy-use pads built through EQIP.

Corn is grown with no-till production mainly on bottomland. Field sizes range from a couple of acres to 80 acres, and travel between fields can be as much as 18 miles. Productivity varies greatly depending on the soil, Raber notes. He feeds most of the corn and sells the soybeans.

## Campbells keep cattle moving

By TIM WHITE

**H**AROLD Campbell taught vocational agriculture for more than 35 years. However, he still considers himself a learner.

"When my son Ben came back to the farm from Ohio State in 1997, he brought some new ideas for rotational grazing. We decided to give it a try. The new technology and advancements for graziers has been amazing," he says. "It's more than you would ever expect."

Campbell's Stone Creek Farms is located near Diamond and adjoins Lake Milton State Park. When he first bought the place in 1977, it had been badly mismanaged. Half was overgrown with brush and half was moderately to severely eroded. The brush land was cut and cleared. The

tillable ground was treated to lime, fertilizer and conservation tillage. He installed five major sod waterways to control runoff and began fencing off the 2 miles of streams that border the farm.

Now the father and son run 400 acres of pasture and 175 acres of hay. With Harold's wife, Maureen, they raise a herd of 100 cow-calf pairs and feed the calves in a small feedlot. The pasture is divided into 4-acre cells, each supplied with its own pressure watering source. In all, 36 outlets connected with 16,000 feet of water lines have been built. Water troughs and mineral feeders are moved along with the cows from cell to cell on a daily basis.

"We try to get the cows to eat no more than half the leaf before we move them out. If each plant is grazed once, it will regrow faster and healthier than if two bites are



**GOOD HELP:** Harold Campbell (standing right) and his son Ben get on-farm help moving the cattle from grandchildren Kristen, 6, Natalie, 3, and Katie, 8.

taken. Then the manure residue works its way into the soil and increases the organic matter. I hate hauling manure. It's better to let the cattle spread it themselves."

Exclusionary fences keep the cattle out of the creek. The creek banks are secured with more than 4,000 trees Harold and Ben planted to protect them. The trees are planted in a double row to create a 30-foot-wide riparian border. Since the creek feeds into the state park's reservoir, maintaining water quality is a strong priority.

They have built 26,000 square feet of heavy-use pads to feed the cattle in winter.

Round bales of baleage are fed to the cows. The pads are served by 5,000 feet of access roads that are also built for heavy use.

The Campbells have hosted numerous groups including the Eastern Ohio Grazing Council and Northeast Ohio Area II Envirothon. Appropriately, the theme for their envirothon station was "Sustainable rangeland management."

"We use solar energy to produce forages," Harold says. "We then manage the forages with beef cattle. All is done with best management practices to protect the environment."