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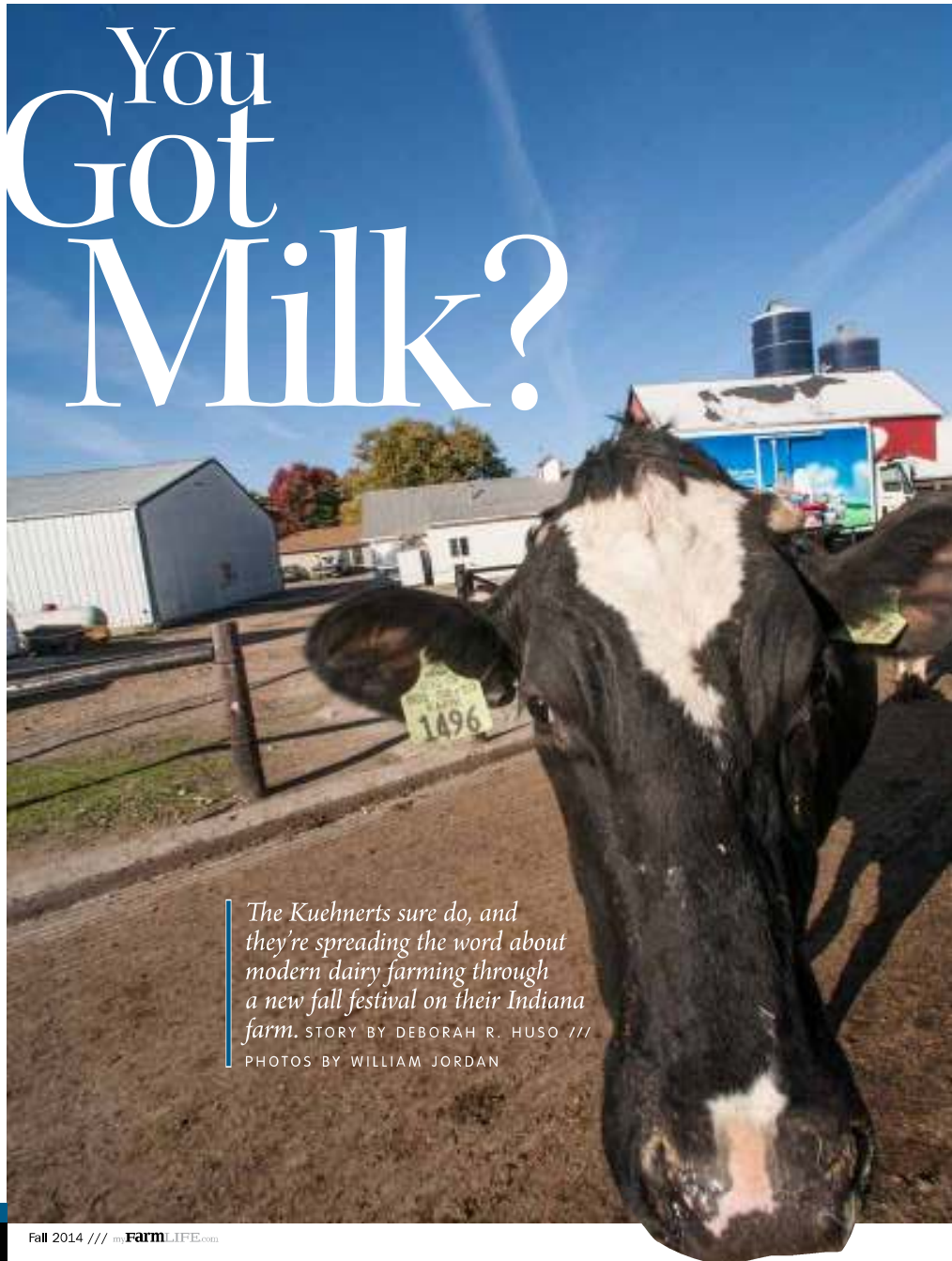
fall 2014



PHOTO: WILLIAM JORDAN

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You Got Milk?



The Kuehnerts sure do, and they're spreading the word about modern dairy farming through a new fall festival on their Indiana farm. STORY BY DEBORAH R. HUSO ///

PHOTOS BY WILLIAM JORDAN



Initial impressions can be deceiving. Take, for instance, the seeming quiet of the Kuehnert Dairy Farm on a Friday or Saturday evening in October.

At first, things look pretty quiet at the dairy, located a few miles northwest of Fort Wayne, Ind. As the sun dips down below the flat western horizon, brown cornstalks rattle in the chilly breeze, and a long white freestall barn comes into view.

The only activity, it seems, are dozens of healthy looking Holsteins with full udders munching feed that consists in part of past-due produce, including pumpkins and veggies, from a local Walmart. Drive a little further, though, and a long line of parked cars come into view, as do scores of parents holding the hands of excited children walking past the barns into an open area surrounded by cattle and cornfields, where the Kuehnert family is hosting its newly initiated fall festival.

For more than 100 years the Kuehnerts have been farming on this land, where they grow corn, soybeans and hay on 1,100 acres. Their bread and butter, however, are the farm's 300 mature Holsteins, which produce seven million pounds of milk a year. Ask fourth-generation producer and family patriarch Al why he added yet another element of work to his day (and night) in the form of a family-oriented festival, and he'll tell you, "It's amazing how many people think milk comes from the grocery store."

Al sees the festival, which his family started in 2013, as a way to educate the general public about agriculture

and, more specifically, dairy. "We think milk is Mother Nature's most perfect food," says Al. The family also uses the festival as a means to promote the dairy products marketed through the 700-member Prairie Farms Dairy cooperative of which the Kuehnerts are a part. Then, there's the benefit of introducing the public to Kuehnert Dairy Farm, which supports Al and his brother, Stan, as full-time farmers, as well as partially supporting the families of Al's two sons, Nathan and Andrew. All together, there are currently four generations of Kuehnerts working in some capacity on this dairy farm.

As parents and children wander the activity area—which consists of a "mountain" of straw bales swarming with little ones, corn hole games, fire pits for roasting marshmallows and a corn crib play area where the "sand" is actually made up of kernels—carefully placed signs educate visitors about the life cycle of dairy cows and how the Kuehnerts care for them. Families enjoy making their way through the five-acre corn maze, and they can also snack on dairy-themed goodies like milkshakes and grilled cheese sandwiches created by Andrew. (The Mouse Trap, which is oozing with melted cheddar, Colby and Havarti cheese, is highly recommended.)

Interacting with the public isn't new to the Kuehnerts, who have been giving farm tours >>



to school groups for 15 years. "We enjoy having people out to the farm, and we knew of other successful dairy farmers pursuing agritourism," Al explains. He mentions another dairy even closer to Fort Wayne that holds a fall festival, as well as one near Indianapolis and another near Goshen. "Our first motive is education," Al adds. "The second is family fun. We want to give people from the city an opportunity to experience farm life while creating family memories."

Al says the biggest attraction at the festival is the hayride, which offers the Kuehnerts the chance to tell visitors about farm life. "It's a 20-minute hayride where we tell people the story of the life cycle of a dairy cow and the hard work that goes into caring for them. We want to show people how well we care for these animals," he says. "We are businessmen, too, and we don't make money unless we take good care of our animals."

As Al gives a hayride tour of the farm, he finds himself bombarded with a variety of questions from visitors. He describes how an average dairy cow carries five to six gallons of milk in her udder and



how most produce milk for four or five years.

"Modern dairy cows are one of God's hardest working creatures," he tells a group of children, who are enthralled by the fact that the average cow eats 100 pounds of feed a day, which, in addition to dry hay, corn silage, hay silage and soy bean meal, includes fruit and vegetables from local grocery stores considered too old for human consumption. "It's another way," Al points out, "that we try to reuse and not waste food products."

Al's wife, Cindy, says most of the festival visitors are couples with young children. "We just see such a huge need for education about agriculture," she notes. "We live so close to the city, and agritourism is very popular."

Al's daughter-in-law, Sarah, who works off the farm as a dietician, handles the marketing side of the month-long event. Raised on a dairy farm herself, she says, "We wanted to do the festival because we feel fortunate to have four generations here working together. We're passionate about educating people on how food gets from the farm to your table."

Sarah admits it's no easy task managing work on



Power And Maneuverability

AL KUEHNERT'S INITIAL REASONS for purchasing the Massey Ferguson 4609 were pretty practical. "I'm really good friends with the dealer," he says, recounting his long-time relationship with Harmony Outdoors owner Don Harter. But despite that friendship, Al had never purchased a Massey Ferguson tractor before the MF4609. "The price was right, and the size of the tractor was right, so we bought it," Al says simply.

However, after using the tractor for the better part of a year now, the co-owner of Kuehnert Dairy Farm near Fort Wayne, Ind., has a long list of reasons the tractor was a terrific purchase for the farm. For starters, Al says he appreciates the fact that the MF4609 has both power and maneuverability. In fact, its three-cylinder diesel AGCO POWER engine has more power than many equivalent four-cylinder engines, allowing it to pull heavy equipment like a 10- to 12-ton sand wagon, yet still enjoy a small enough size to maneuver it easily inside the close quarters of the barn.

"The turning radius for a 90-horsepower tractor is great," Al adds. "It turns really sharp, and I like the new style clutch." The MF4609 has 12 forward and 12 reverse speeds that don't require use of the foot clutch for shifting from forward to reverse and back again.

His son Nathan agrees. "We appreciate the flexibility of it and the diversity of different things we can do with it," he remarks. "It's compact but can handle some of the bigger jobs we do. We use it to bed the stalls. We use it a lot on our manure pumps. We use it to haul silage wagons. Plus, it's easy to get on and off of. We'd be inclined to buy a larger one down the road."

"Donnie treats us right, too," Al adds. "Donnie has made the whole [purchase] process easy, and his follow-up on service has been excellent, too."

and off the farm for herself, her husband, Nathan, and brother-in-law, Andrew. However, the response to the first year of the fall festival has been worth it to them. "We've had families spend hours here," she says, "and many came back more than once."

Last year, the festival drew 3,500 visitors, no small feat in Al's opinion. "We had a really good turnout, especially given the bad weather we had every weekend," he says and adds that it accomplished job number 1. "Our main thing with doing the festival is to educate the consumer about dairy and show people where their milk comes from." **FL**

For more about the Kuehnert Dairy Farm Fall Festival, including dates and times for the 2014 event, see myFarmLife.com/fallfestival.