

To A Higher Power

Many farm families give credit for any success they experience to many factors. Hard work, family dedication, management of finances, production and luck are a few. The Eli Zimmerman families from Maiden Creek Township do not believe in luck. They give credit to their success to a Higher Power. Their devotion to God, the land and their community has helped on their farm. Eli's parents, who came from Terre Hill in Lancaster County, started dairy farming when they purchased the one hundred and six acre farm in 1956. Eli and his wife Barbara married and started farming on a neighboring farm in 1984. In 1992 they purchased and moved on the home farm. Knowing their sons wanted to have careers in production agriculture and wanting to keep the family farm in food production, the agriculture land conservation easements were sold in 1997. Eli mentioned sadly, "It seems every time you turn around, another farm is being developed into houses, warehouses or solar panels.

Recently, sons Josh and Austin purchased the sixty cow dairy herd. Last year, when they decided to upgrade the dairy by building a robotic parlor and freestall barn, they made a formal commitment by forming a LLC business of Walnuttown Dairy. Josh, wife Crystal and sons Asher and Onyx live and work on the farm. When asked what is the most challenging aspect of farming he replied, "Managing all the moving parts while keeping everything running smoothly." Austin, wife Gina and children live nearby and although he has an off farm job working at Mechanical Sunny Side Ag, repairing tractors and farm equipment, he helps daily with milking and plays a critical part in cow care.

As their sons and three daughters grew older and to diversify, two poultry broiler houses were added to the farm operation in 2003 and are managed by Eli. Commodities produced include double cropping forages, corn and small grains, which most are feed to the dairy animals. Milk is marketed through Clover Farms and the organic meat birds through Coleman Natural Foods.

The Zimmerman's are excellent examples of families on over 800 farms in Berks that have made a permanent commitment to produce food on preserved farms through the Berks County/Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Preservation Program. Eli stated: "Working with God's creation and having two son's involved in food production on the home farm gives him a good feeling of satisfaction."