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Farm News

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Harvey and Jackie Menn and their children, Jenna, Kayla, Ryan and Kyle, will host the Monroe County Dairy Breakfast June 6 at their farm near Norwalk. The Menns hosted the county's breakfast 20 years ago.

Photo by Karen Parker

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What: Monroe County Dairy Breakfast.

When: 7 to 11 a.m. Saturday, June 6.

Where: Lawn View Farm, 25593 County Highway T, Norwalk. Parking and a bus shuttle will be in the Degenhardt Implement parking lot, east of Norwalk on Highway 71.

Menu: Ham and cheese omelets, pancakes, Culver's sundaes, coffee cake, cookies, buttered toast, cheese and milk.

Cost: \$4 for adults, \$2 for children 6 to 10, and free for children 5 and younger.

Information: Mary Cook, 608-463-7379.

Family reprises breakfast-host role 20 years later

By Karen Parker

Correspondent

NORWALK - Two decades can make quite a difference.

In 1989, when Lawn View Farm near Norwalk was the site of the Monroe County Dairy Breakfast, Harvey and Jackie Menn had been married less than a year and were junior partners in the farm owned by Harvey's parents, Robert and Donna Menn.

Twenty years later, Harvey and Jackie have four children and are the farm's sole owners.

Although the farm owners' first names have changed in the past 155 years, their surname hasn't. And for all of that time, the Menn family has bred and milked Jerseys.

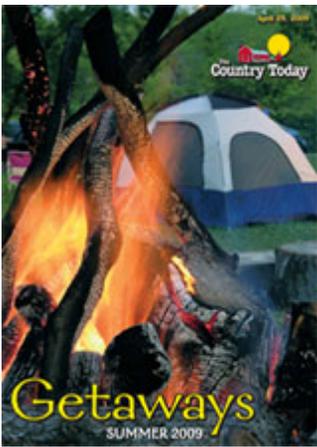
The 1989 dairy breakfast was the first time the event was hosted at a Jersey farm. This year, the new generation of Menns has added its own twist: It's the first time the Monroe County Breakfast will be at an organic farm.

The organic presence will be reflected in the menu. Organic Valley Family of Farms, a La Farge-based cooperative, will provide organic eggs, milk,

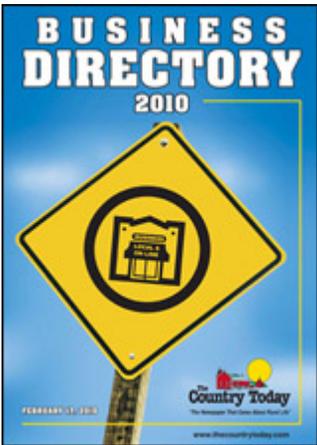
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string cheese and half-and-half.

The Menns began marketing their milk through Organic Valley on Jan. 1, but it took three years to make the shift from conventional dairying. The couple expressed enthusiasm for the program, though Harvey thought it would take another two years to gauge whether the operation had been a success.

"We were both a little skeptical," Jackie said.

But improved herd health has been a big selling point.

"We've noticed that the cattle have fewer health problems, or all of a sudden we will realize we are no longer seeing diseases we saw before," she said.

For Jackie, the move to organic farming centered on her concerns about chemicals.

"One day when I looked out the window and saw Harvey in a cloud of anhydrous ammonia, I knew we needed a change," she said.

"It's good for the land and a more sustainable way of farming," she added.

Harvey said his motivation was improving his small farm's chances of survival.

"I don't have the land to develop a big operation, and I didn't want to do it anyway," he said. "Organics appeared to be a way to stay in dairy farming for smaller operations."

Although the buildings have been expanded over the years, the farm is essentially the same as it was more than a century ago. Accommodating 80 registered cows and 75 replacement heifers, the farm encompasses 198 acres, 76 of which are tillable, plus the Menns rent an additional 50 acres.

Managing the farm is a full-time job, but Harvey also teaches technology education at Brookwood High School. His position is seven-eighths time, which allows him to leave early in the afternoon. Still, that makes for a long day this time of year, requiring the Menns to hire extra help.

So how does a man that busy get talked into having 3,000 people over for breakfast?

"It was the women in my family," he joked.

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The oldest child, Kayla, 17, will graduate from high school this month, and she thought it would be a great idea, particularly because she wasn't born in time for the last breakfast. She had support from her sister Jenna, 15. All four of the Menn children are active in 4-H, and Harvey and Jackie serve on the Elroy Fair Board.

Thanks to the Menn children and their 4-H activities, dairy breakfast guests will have more than Jersey cows to look at. Both girls have horses, and Jenna specializes in birds, mostly chickens and turkeys. Kayla raises rabbits and goats, and Ryan, 11, favors pigs.

A petting zoo will have some additional animals to amuse children at the breakfast, Jackie said.

It's uncertain whether a sixth generation will take over the farm, but the Menn children have a strong interest in agriculture.

Kayla plans to attend UW-River Falls this fall to pursue a degree in agriculture education. Her parents attended UW-Madison. Harvey has a degree in agriculture education and Jackie has a degree in dairy science.

The Monroe County Dairy Breakfast also will feature educational displays, horse-drawn wagon rides, an antique tractor display, dog agility demonstrations and an animal education center.

Visitors may want to rest on the front porch of the 1890s farm house and take in the valley stretching before them. There, they can see why five generations of Menns called the farm Lawn View.

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