

# The Kiefer Family – milking cows for over 60 years

By Terri Lang

The Kiefer dairy farm northeast of Strasburg has been operating for over 60 years. Leo Kiefer took over the family farm in 1980. He remembers as a child, milking with his parents, Joe and Julia Kiefer, and his eight siblings.

“I think I was about five or six years old when I first started milking the cows,” Leo said.

Leo’s mom, Julia (daughter of Mike and Rose Jacob) also grew up on a dairy farm northeast of Linton. Mike and Rose had nine children, and about 50 dairy cows.

“We all had to help with milking the cows, the boys and the girls. Everybody helped until the job was done,” Julia said.

Every morning, around 7 a.m. they started their chores, and milked again then in the evening around 6 p.m.

The children were in charge of feeding the little calves and the pigs, in addition to milking.

The milk that was produced was used to feed the calves and pigs, and some was sold, along with the cream.

“We would separate the milk and cream, and the milk truck would pick it up every week and sometimes, more often. We also took some to the creamery in Linton,” Julia said.

Farmers couldn’t save the milk for a long period of time as they had no cool place to keep it, so it had to be sold.

Joe’s parents, Leo’s grandparents, John and Theresia Kiefer, milked about 10 to 15 cows.

Joe and Julia Kiefer started milking in the mid-1950s and usually had 15 to 25 dairy cows. All of their nine children helped with the milking chores. They woke them early in the morning, and were milking by 6.

“We had to get the milking done before the bus picked us up to go to school,” Leo said.

He remembers when the milk truck from Hague would come to their farm to pick up the cream they would sell.

“They got the cream from us and they would bring us the empty jugs so mom could refill them again,” he said.

Leo remembers his mom separating the cream, and she made other products such as butter and cottage cheese.

“And of course, she made lots of homemade ice cream,” Leo said.

Some of the cream was also sold to cream stations in nearby towns. The money they got for the cream was always very useful.

“That’s how we paid for our groceries,” Julia said. “But we didn’t need to buy a lot of groceries since we had our own food from the farm.”

Much of the milk that was produced was consumed by their family, and the pigs and calves on the farm.

Leo said that his brothers, along with his mom and dad, did most of the milking, but the girls helped, too. He remembers some of the fun they had as kids in the milk barn.

“We would squirt each other across the aisles as we were milking, and we also shot milk at the cats’ mouths,” he chuckled.

Leo also remembers when he was a preschool boy, his dad would hitch up the horses



Leo Kiefer has been operating the dairy farm northeast of Strasburg since 1980. He has a buddy with him on the farm – his dog beside him, “Buddy.”



Leo also runs about 200 beef cows with his brothers, Roger and Joe. Leo is proud of his own 65 Red Angus cattle. He said it has been a real good calving season.



Leo Kiefer said milking isn’t always a lot of hard work, but it is a lot of work and takes a lot of time. He milks at 5 a.m., and with milking chores, he puts in four hours in the morning, and three hours at the 5 p.m. milking time. Using a double-five Herringbone Parlor, it takes Leo about three to five minutes to milk each cow.

to a sled and get the square bales for the cows with it.

“Dad would say the horses’ names and they would take off with the sled,” Leo said. “I always got rides on the sled but I didn’t have to do the work, I just enjoyed the ride!”

After his dad finished with the bales, they would clean the barn using the sled.

Those rides didn’t last for too many years, as his dad got a tractor which helped with the workload on the farm.

Milking was hard work in those days, and it was a lot of work. It was not just the time that was spent milking in the barn but all the other work that came along with it - rounding up the cows, feeding the calves and cleaning the barn.

They also had 300 chickens, and at butchering time, the whole family had to help.

“The girls did most of the work, but sometimes the boys helped a little bit by picking

the feathers,” Julia said.

There were many families in the dairy business in Emmons County when Joe and Julia milked, and even when Leo took over the operation in 1980, there were over 200 dairy farms.

In 1980, Leo milked about 60 cows, and peaked at about 80 over the years. He currently has about 45 dairy cows, each cow producing about 60 pounds per day.

The prices have fluctuated over the years, and presently, Leo receives about \$18 per hundred weight, with the premiums.

“Milk prices are like a roller coaster ride,” Leo said. “But recently, they have stabilized some.”

The dairy industry was expected to stabilize over the next year or two, and the milk prices looked a bit more promising for 2017, according to dairy industry experts.

“Some were saying that the prices would go up \$2 per hundred weight but that hasn’t happened yet,” he said.

As for the future of the dairy industry, a lot of it depends on where the commodity prices are going. Another factor is the weather, and what we are seeing now, is that we need rain.

“The pastures don’t look good right now, plus we had a winter kill on the alfalfa,” Leo said. “But it didn’t look good last year either, and we had the best corn crop ever.”

Leo will keep at it as he enjoys being on the farm and likes his livestock.

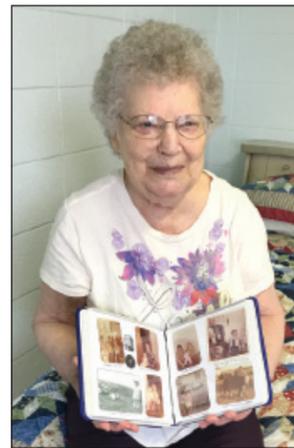
“I enjoy working with the livestock and would much rather do that than work with grains,” Leo said.



In the basement of the Kiefer home on the farm is the cream separator that his mom used to separate the milk from the cream in the early days.



Joe Kiefer and Julia Jacob were united in marriage on June 8, 1954. Joe died at an early age of 50 on Sept. 9, 1979.



Julia Kiefer is 87 years old and currently residing at the Strasburg Care Center. She is looking through a photoalbum that her daughter, Clarice, gave to her on her 75th birthday.



Leo is the oldest of the nine children born to Joe and Julia Kiefer. He was born on Feb. 27, 1955.

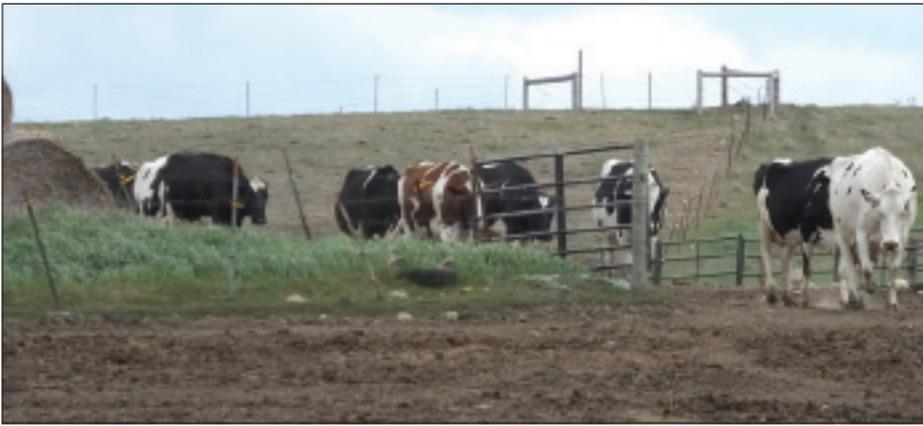
**TL Leo Kiefer**



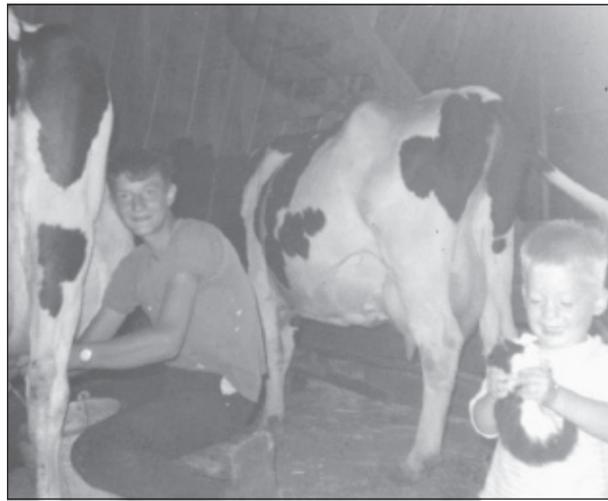
The Kiefer sisters with their mom, Julia, on her 85th birthday, are, left to right, Lillian (Kuntz), Clarice (Gauer), Marietta (Dietz) and Lorraine Kiefer.



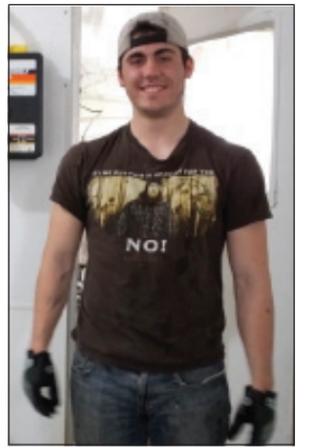
The Kiefer brothers with their mom, Julia, on her 85th birthday, are, left to right, Roger, Joe, Leo, Tom and Darrel.



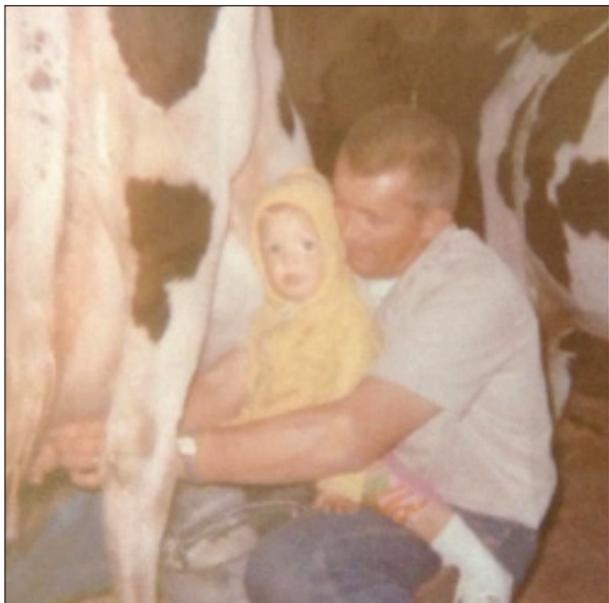
Leo's 45 dairy cows casually walk to the milk parlor as Leo rounds them up for milking time.



Leo, as a young teenager, is milking while his younger brother, Darrel, is playing with a cat.



Adam Hulm, son of Andy and Lisa Hulm, was at his first day on the job at the Leo Kiefer farm on Mon., May 15.



Joe Kiefer is holding his youngest daughter, Clarice, as he milks the cows.