

THE RECORDER

Serving the people of Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region

recorder.com

ESTABLISHED
1792

SATURDAY & SUNDAY

April 26, 2014

Cow vs. SHEEP



Recorder/Paul Franz

Brothers David and Mark Duprey of Bernardston have kept their families farming, but each has their own farm off Eden Trail and their own livestock. Mark raises cows at Sunbrite Farm and David raises sheep at Leyden Glen Farm. The two brothers, working either side of the road, are a little like their herds: different, but both tied to the land where they grew up, the fourth generation to care for this terrain close to where Bernardston, Greenfield and Leyden intersect. See our feature story on Page D1



On the trail to Eden

Brothers keep their families farming: one with sheep, the other cows

Story by Richie Davis

Photos by Paul Franz

It's a woolly world north of Eden. Sheep and lambs roam everywhere and bleating echoes all around the property, which is bisected by a rutted dirt path off Bernardston's Eden Trail.

A dozen or more of the cross-bred, larger yearlings — some with fluffy wool that's every child's epitome of a sheep, others with the more matted fiber — are clustered around a giant roll of hay, devouring it from every angle on a frosty Tuesday morning in a large, open-air barn.

Farmer Mark Duprey is tending to a newborn lamb discovered just an hour or so ago, with some blood still coating part of its tiny white body. He places it in a round, makeshift pen to be cared for by its mother.

So far this winter, more than 260 lambs have been born on Leyden Glen Farm, where the lone human caretaker is surrounded by roughly 300 ewes and 260 lambs, each weighing maybe 10 pounds a piece.

"By New England standards, this is a pretty big operation," he says, wearing a work jacket and Nepalese woolen stocking hat to ward off the 30-degree chill. "By world standards, it's pitifully small. In New Zealand, this doesn't even reach hobby stage yet."

'Eat and eat'

Meanwhile, north of Eden, Mark's brother, David, uses a Unigrip claw extending from his red Massey-Ferguson tractor to lift a 1,000-pound bale of hay for his dairy herd on his Sunbrite Farm. A few of the Holsteins, fronted by one named Mindy, look on nearby, anticipating that it might be nearing lunchtime.

"The damn cows just eat and eat," says David, as another bale of hay grinds together with corn silage in a red Trivolt Solomix nearby, creating that evening's "total mixed ration" meal. Then, on second thought, he corrects himself: "eat and shit."

The dairy farmer, also wearing a stocking cap and a work coat with some matted fibers poking out, feeds about three of these large bales each day to his herd, which numbers about 110 cows in all. "Probably more than I should have," he said.

The farm, started by their grandfather, George, and his father, Octave, about 100 years ago, is the site of Burke Fort, the first and largest of the settlements in town, where 50 people took shelter during the French and Indian War.

The two brothers, working either side of the road, are a little like their herds: different, but both tied to the land where they grew up, the fourth generation to care for this terrain close to where Bernardston, Greenfield and Leyden intersect.

The farm, started by their grandfather, George, and his father, Octave, about 100 years ago, is the site of Burke Fort, the first and largest of the settlements in town, where 50 people took shelter during the French and Indian War. The 225-acre farm was passed on to Norman Duprey, who operated it as a dairy farm with about 40 Holsteins. He was helped by his brother, Albert.

Sunbrite Farm's bottling plant — from which Norman Duprey had his milk delivered around Bernardston, Greenfield, Turners Falls and Northfield by a milkman named Harold 'Woody' Wood in the 1950s and '60s — is partially used as the current farm's milk room and partially as the farm's workshop.

When Norman Duprey, who was one of a dozen dairy farmers operating in a town that now has two farms, died in 1965, David was just 12, and Mark was 8.

At a time when the county's abundant dairies were beginning to diminish, the Dupreys auctioned off the herd and farm equipment in 1966. The land was semi-idle, rented occasionally to neighboring farmers for growing hay and pasturing their animals.

Milk processing at Sunbrite had ended a couple of years before Norman's death at age 46 and neither of the boys, or their younger brother, Michael, had shown interest in dairying.

"I didn't really give it much

See EDEN Page D3



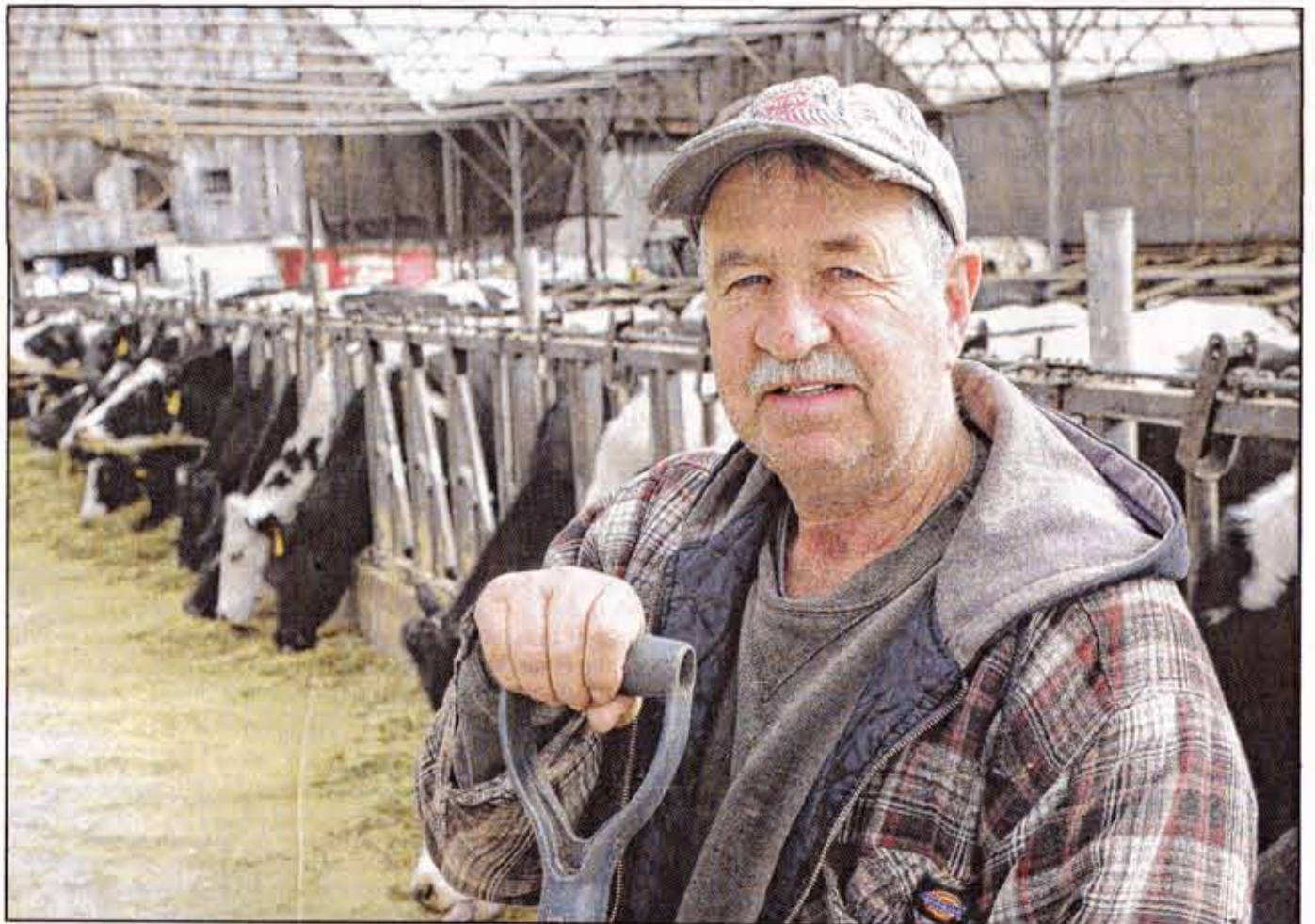
Mark Duprey of Leyden Glen Farm with a pair of young lambs.



Newborn lamb at Leyden Glen Farm.



Whisky at Sunbrite Farm.



David Duprey of Sunbrite Farm.

Eden: 'Land that holds the world together'

From Page D1

thought," recalls David, now 60. "My mother used to say I spent most of my time getting in the way and, if given a chance, I would have liked driving a tractor.

He recalls only being part of a 4H dairying club and even showing calves with friends in Bernardston. "I wasn't really a farmer like they were farmers, because there weren't cows here anymore. I don't even remember how I went about getting calves to show, or where I kept them."

Brother Mark recalls having chickens and selling eggs in the years after his father's death, with his mother driving him on the route. Eventually, he went on to study animal science at the University of Massachusetts. It was during an exchange program at Oregon State University his junior year that he took a course in sheep production and thought, "Great, I can use my degree, but I don't have to milk cows twice a day. I can have an off-farm job."

At Oregon State, he also met his future wife, Kristin Nicholas, a visiting University of Delaware student majoring in fiber design. Her mastery of knitting, yarns, and marketing would become critical to paying for their farm together.

Itch to farm

South of Eden, David, who graduated Greenfield Community College, began in the mid-70s pondering a way to live on the farm, close to his mother, Betty.

"I thought this is as good a spot on this earth for me to be, right here," says David, who now lives with his wife, Debbie, in the house he grew up in.

"I kind of had the itch and said, 'I'm going to see if I can make a living here. But living on a farm can be kind of expensive. Not knowing what else to do, to have the farm here, I said 'I guess, I've got to have some cows.'"

After GCC, David stayed close to farming, working for Farm Bureau Feeds, then at Greenfield Farmers Exchange, and then at the Agway fertilizer plant at the East Deerfield rail yard. There, unloading fertilizer one day, he suffered a life-changing accident: his right foot slipped through a grate and the bottom of his leg had to be amputated.

"At that point in time, I was at a crossroads: 'What are you going to do now?'"

He used workers' compensation payments to attend the University of Massachusetts, but after the two-year agriculture program, which he enjoyed, David decided he wasn't cut out to be a student and decided, after raising some beef cattle, to try dairying, despite his prosthetic leg.

"I wanted to try farming at that point and there were some heifers I was raising," recalls David, who bought a small tractor, began haying and took out a Farmers Home Administration loan to put a milking herd together.

"My mother sort of discouraged me, telling me, 'Work with your brain and not your back. But she supported me once she saw I really wanted to do it,'" says David, who'd married in 1979 and bought a house nearby, on South Street.

Keeping the traditional Sunbrite Farm name, David and Debbie started farming in 1982 on 112 of the family's 225 acres — all but about 40 of them open for haying and pasture land. When his mother died in 1985, she left the other half of the property north of Eden to his two brothers. He now rents an additional 75 to 100 acres to grow hay.

Making it pay

David Duprey jokingly calls the farm where he and his brothers grew up "the land that holds the world together," a suggestion that in all of the hustle and bustle of a spinning world, this a piece of heaven that moves along at its own cud-chewing pace — even with its daily equipment breakdowns and other routine agricultural headaches.

What helps keep the farming operations together, though, are Mark's wife, Kristin Nicholas, and David's wife, Debbie. Both have spun their own off-the-farm jobs to help pay the bills.

Kristin has put her fiber design training



In this 2011 file photo, sheep from Mark Duprey's Leyden Glen Farm are herded down Eden Trail in Leyden and to their winter pasture. Helping keep them together is the family's border collie, Ness, at right.

and her background creating knitting patterns for sweaters and other garments to work in a diverse collage of teaching, designing and other artistic endeavors — right down to arranging and shooting photos of her own prepared lamb recipes to guide the farm's meat customers.

"It makes my head spin sometimes to think all we do," says Kristin. "We're, like, psychotic busy ... all the stuff we do to try to make money."

Mark adds, "We both do really neat things that make no money. We wonder how we can keep doing any of this stuff. It's like reverting to the old model of doing six different things to make a living."

At Sunbrite Farm, one of the eight original dairy farms that created Our Family Farms milk marketing cooperative in 1997, Debbie worked for 10 years off the farm as the cooperative's manager. A couple of years ago, she returned to work at the Richard D. Smith paper company in Greenfield, where she had worked for 18 years when the couple's three children were young.

"She needed to get a place that provided health insurance," says David. "My wife has always worked off the farm and her off-farm income probably made the difference between (the farm) staying in business or not. I made a deal with her long ago: I'll pay the taxes, the insurance, the mortgage and you put the food on the table. That's how it's always worked out."

The irony of the labor-intensive work of a farm not putting food on the table is one that's only clear to David, whose farm income has also had a hard time keeping up with mushrooming health-care costs. So that, too, has fallen to Debbie, "which is a biggie."

Debbie, who grew up around farms in Leyden but not on one, met David through a mutual Leyden friend before he bought his dairy herd.

"I had no idea what I'd be in for," she says with a laugh. She periodically helps milk the cows a 6 a.m., but more often works on the books, which she likes to do around 11 p.m.

"The biggest adjustment has been living on a tight budget, squeezing out every nickel," she says. "But I love living around the animals and I really like where I live. Raising the kids, it was wonderful. We never really had a vacation, but we had three four-wheelers and we'd go out in the woods and have a picnic between

chores. That's just what we did."

Marrying the farm

North of Eden, Mark Duprey, 57, stands in the "modified greenhouse" he built in the early 1990s, on the 112-acre property where his younger brother, Michael, a contractor, also does maple sugaring and cuts cordwood.

The structure, with a breathable fabric along the bottom 4 feet to provide ventilation, serves as a large protected area for the lambs and yearlings during the winter; this winter was cold enough that he had to use heat lamps to keep some of the most vulnerable lambs warm.

Although the flock overwinters here, and in the surrounding 15 acres or so of open terrain, Mark keeps the herd on various rented fields, as well as other land he owns in Greenfield and at home in Leyden, less than 10 miles away but seemingly on a different planet because of the different cultures between the two neighboring towns.

Mark and Kristin bought their first Romney sheep together in 1980, before they were even married.

"My mother-in-law said, 'Some people get an engagement ring; Kristin got four sheep,'" recalls Kristin. "When you marry a farm boy, you marry the farm."

Dividing his time between selling construction blasting equipment and tending his flock is a balancing act, Mark says, but since the most labor-intensive winter feeding and lambing period coincides with shutdown of the road construction, he manages.

"I'm trying to farm in New England, a land of 3-acre pastures," he says. "What I do would be so much easier with 100 acres without the constant moving from one spot to another. People left New England for a very good reason. Our land base isn't suited to large-scale agriculture. If you're in Idaho with 26,000 ewes on (federal) land, it's a different way of doing things. I rely very heavily on different landlords and 80 percent of the land I farm doesn't belong to me."

The two brothers keep their farming operations separate, but they sometimes share equipment if a tractor breaks down, for instance. They also cooperate when Mark's sheep work their way back to over-winter in Bernardston each fall — usually with Mark driving them, traditional-style, on foot along Eden Trail, kept in check by border collie Ness. Along the way, David lets the sheep graze one of his hay fields in late October or early November.

"By then, I'm usually pretty sick of haying," jokes David. "Basically, I give him that whole crop and hopefully by then I've got enough of my own."

North and south, the Duprey brothers work constantly, tending their animals, repairing equipment and trying to make farming pay. It

isn't easy, but each brother says he thinks he can do better with his own brand of farming than what goes on across the road.

"I've seen what he goes through and I have no particular interest in sheep," says David. "When it comes right down to it, I think I can make a better living with my cows."

The price paid for milk now, about \$22 to \$23 per dozen-gallon hundredweight, is higher than it's been in a long time, he says. But he adds quickly that so are the costs of feed and fuel.

"Cows are more of an interest for me," he says, "though there are times when I have a cow that falls down and I say, 'Why don't I have sheep or goats? At least I can pick them up.' Otherwise, it's 1,500 pounds of dead weight."

He's still recovering from a torn rotator cuff on his left shoulder after a 1,200-pound cow that thought he was trying to harm her calf attacked him in a pen last fall.

"She started pounding me and I says, 'I've got to get out of here or this freakin' cow's going to kill me!' She put her head back, snort, POW. Back up, do it again ... She really did a job on this shoulder."

Duprey relies on three part-time helpers, especially to help lift the milking machine given his damaged left arm.

"I do a lot of things, but I just can't do that."

He adds, "I think farming with one leg has been my weakest link. Some days just I just don't do well. And now that I'm slowing down and can't do what I used to be able to do, at least at this point in time, none of my (three grown) kids want to farm."

Helped also by Debbie handling the dairy farm's bookkeeping, David, like his brother, laments "One of the worst things about farming, and it always been this way, is the financial end of it, never mind the work."

Yet getting additional income from Our Family Farms, which does its own distribution, marketing and promotions, "has made a huge impact on being able to continue."

Still, across the road, Mark points out that a dairy farm like his brother has is a huge investment. And unlike his sheep, cows need to be milked twice a day.

"Sheep can have less land and more marginal land," says Mark, who sells his meat at Amherst's weekly winter farmers market and at the Northampton and Amherst farmers markets each summer. That's where he can find customers who can afford to pay for local, grass-fed lamb.

"It's my biggest struggle," he says of the business end of farming. "I know how to raise animals, but raising them in profitable manner is a real challenge."

Leyden Glen sells its lamb at Atlas Farm as well as at Green Fields Market, but Mark says he's gotten away from wholesale sales to restaurants, with the occasional exception of the Wagon Wheel in Gill.

"You've got to give a pretty significant discount. And if you're not making money in retail, you don't say, 'I'm going to make (that discount) up in volume.' You've got to be profitable."

On either side of Eden Trail, it's clear the farm life is not paradise; it's hard work, as farming has always been. Mark sees promise in the trend of more people appreciating having local farms and, to some extent, willing to pay a little more to ensure that their milk and their lamb are produced close to home.

"Even after the fad's gone, I still think there will be a lot of people who've been exposed to the value of small, local agriculture and it's kind of a neat time to be in this. I enjoy going to farmers markets because you're around really smart people and that's one of the reasons I like selling to Atlas. For years and years, all you heard was the demise of small farms. Now you've got best and brightest going into agriculture."

On the Web: www.leydenglenlamb.com
www.ourfamilyfarms.com/duprey.html

Senior reporter Richie Davis has worked at The Recorder for more than 35 years. He can be reached at rdavis@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 269.

Staff photographer Paul Franz has worked for The Recorder since 1988. He can be reached at pfranz@recorder.com or 413-772-0261 ext. 266. His website is www.franzphoto.com.



Recorder/Paul Franz
Debbie Duprey at Sunbrite Farm.

Knitting together creative opportunities

When Mark Duprey and Kristin Nicholas decided to get married, they moved to Pepperill and then Groton and she worked for a yarn company in Lowell while Mark worked at various sales jobs before moving to a 1751 Cape-style house in Leyden in 1999.

They raise their lambs primarily for meat, selling the 2,000 pounds or so of wool sheared from their sheep each summer to a New Hampshire farm that has it woven into blankets on Prince Edward Island. Nicholas has a reputation in her own right as a designer and knitting expert.

She maintains a studio in their Leyden Glen home — about two miles from the Bernardston farm as the crow flies — but a five- to 10-minute drive around East Hill.



NICHOLAS

There, in a space featured in the issue of "Where Women Create" magazine, Nicholas writes books on knitting, develops courses on knitting and embroidery and designs yarn.

She's had nine books published on knitting, embroidery and stitchery, with another two embroidery books underway. Her knitting and embroidery patterns are sold on her kristinnicholas.com website and elsewhere on the web and she designs two lines of yarn: "Color by Kristin," a Peruvian-spun blend of wool, mohair and alpaca in 26 colors she adds to each year, as well as Regia's "Garden Effects," a sock yarn.

On top of that, Nicholas teaches knitting and crocheting on PBS's Create channel — there's even one

on how to knit a mink stole — as well as on the Internet sites Craftsy and Creative Bug. Plus, for the past five years, she's done studio workshops, attracting people from as far away as Arizona and Minnesota who follow her "Getting Stitched on the Farm" blog and her online and on-air courses.

"I've been in the needlework industry since 1984 and most people think of me as a knitwear designer because I've designed hundreds of sweaters," says Nicholas, who travels to Detroit for the PBS shows and recently traveled to Colorado for the Craftsy classes on crewel embroidery. "I have a following. People can buy a class (online) anywhere in the world and take a lesson from me."

Nicholas has even designed a signature "Garden of Family Farm Life" line of wallpaper murals for

Casart. Her images of a black lamb bleating on a hand-knit red striped sweater or a white lamb decked out in bright pink sweater with a trim of crochet flowers are among the farm-inspired note cards she sells online.

And Nicholas does her own gauche illustrations and photography for her books and also designs and photographs the lamb recipes she develops for the farm.

"People don't know how to cook lamb," says Nicholas, 53, who occasionally helps out on the farm as well. "The key to demand is I have to keep developing recipes."

Mark adds, "My job is raise animals. Her job is to make me look good, because she's good at marketing."

On the Web: www.kristinnicholas.com
— RICHIE DAVIS



Recorder/Paul Franz
Examples of Kristin Nicholas' products.