

First, Pet the Cow

by Shelli Manning

To folks outside the ag industry, to little boys and girls everywhere, the idea of ‘working with animals’ evokes images of furry kittens and playful puppies, perhaps working in a vet clinic, or an animal shelter fostering pets-in-need until they have found ‘forever homes’...

To those who work in agriculture, however, it means something different; it’s a lifestyle, a livelihood. To dairymen like Scott Blevins ‘working with animals’ means overseeing the care and well-being of nearly 6,000 cows, most of which are full grown and weigh on average 1,500 lbs. making them a little more challenging to handle (and cuddle) than those kitties and pups.

Working day-to-day with production animals is also different than companion animals in that it’s not difficult to lose perspective of the animal itself; instead thinking in terms of units, gallons or dollars. With one simple rule, Scott created a positive paradigm shift to offset that tendency with his team. As silly as they may sometimes feel it is, employees are required to ‘pet the cow’. When an animal is approached for any type of care, the first interaction the worker has is to take a moment to pet them. Simplistic perhaps, but it has created a culture in which it’s impossible to forget you’re dealing with a live animal. It makes even the most challenging of situations – even getting a 1,500 lb. animal to stand, when she doesn’t particularly want to – safer and more humane for everyone.

Scott is the Dairy Manager at one of the most progressive farms in Wisconsin; Greenleaf-based, Wiese Brothers Dairy. It’s a position he’s held for eleven years and finds great satisfaction in. When managing an operation as large as Wiese Brothers, ensuring the wellbeing of animals involves far more than hands-on care the animals themselves. It means leadership and supervision of a sizeable team of employees. It means ensuring the proper training of staff, adhering to standard operating procedures (SOPs), and staying current with a myriad of regulations. For Scott, it also means “know your people.” He makes a point to be in tune with employees; who they are, what their day-to-day lives look like and how that impacts their job performance.

Blevins finds it helpful to have strong industry partners. While he consults with several veterinarians as well as a nutritionist on animal care, he’s able to find additional value within ANIMART’s Professional Services team – with veterinarians, veterinary technicians, a licensed pharmacist and a milk quality specialist all on staff – they are well positioned to address Rx needs, help with developing SOPs and with bi-lingual support staff, and new on-farm training program; ANIMART YOUiversity™, they can even help fill in training gaps.

He also works closely with Key Account Manager, Pat Mueller, and utilizes the ANIMART Inventory Management system (AIMsystem™), so he's able to focus more on the care of the herd and team leadership. Having worked together for nearly five years, Scott trusts Pat to keep him up-to-date on the latest advancements and product offerings that might be beneficial to the farm and the cows.

Despite plans to teach, it's not surprising Scott ended up in his current role, given his upbringing on progressive dairies. First on a large operation in Northern Louisiana, and then when Scott was 14, the family moved to Tuttle, Oklahoma where his father worked at Braum's Dairy; a name well known in the dairy industry for their colossal size and accomplishments in vertical integration. After high school, Scott went on to Oklahoma State University and received a degree in Agricultural Education with plans to be an Ag teacher. Teaching got put on the backburner, however, in lieu of being back on farm. First he spent time working cattle feed lots in Texas, then back to Oklahoma to a cow/calf operation before eventually returning to his dairy roots, ending up in 'America's Dairyland', where he's happy to have found a home with Wiese Brothers.



Scott and his son, Wyatt, along with a calf Wyatt showed at the Brown County Fair.

Ultimately, pursuing a career working with production animals requires intelligence, strength, stamina and most importantly, passion for the wellbeing of the animals themselves. Scott feels fortunate not only for the opportunity to put his knowledge and experience to use, but also to work with supportive owners; Mark and Dave Wiese and lead a top notch team of employees, all the while caring for the animals on farm and teaching others to do the same. When Scott isn't busy overseeing the dairy, he enjoys hunting, spending time with his kids; Wyatt, Haley Sue and Payti Jo, and caring for another animal -their four legged canine friend, Gus Willy.



Scott's daughter, Haley Sue, poses for a photo with the family's dog, Gus Willy.

About the Author:

ANIMART's staff writer, Shelli Manning, works to share the human interest side of individuals in production agriculture and communicate their passions which contribute to our unique American Story. She is the published author of Little Fish, as well as a motivational speaker on women's issues and an advocate for the reduction of domestic violence.