

Dairy farm brought Minster man home again

By Susan Fox

You know what they say: 'You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.' Old sayings may just become old sayings because they say something important.

Sometimes, though, they are wrong. As Mike Bensman of Min-Edge Farm found out, you can come home again.

Bensman left the family dairy farm to get an education and find a job in something other than farming.

"I guess I took a lot of things for granted when I was a kid," he said. "I thought a career in agriculture was not for me."

He attended a General Motors school and got a degree in mechanical engineering in a work-study program. Within a year of moving to Michigan, Bensman found himself out of his element, far from his dairy farm home and not very happy with what he saw of life in the cities of Flint and Lansing. He stuck it out for five years until he had received his degree and met his obligation to the company, then he came home.

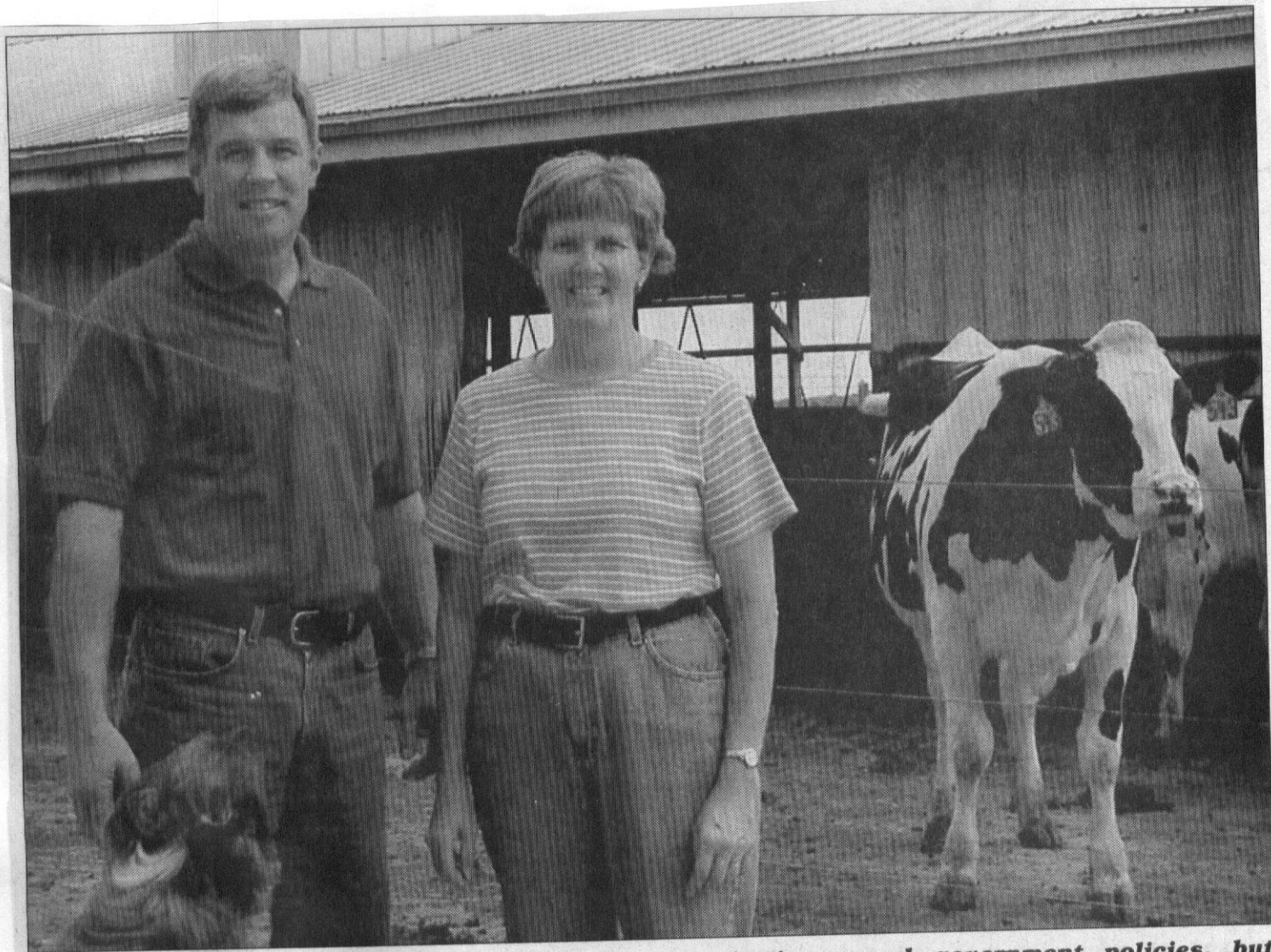
"I didn't like what I was seeing," he said. "There were too many opportunities to be less of a person than I think we should try to be, and I realized how much I missed the farm. I knew if I ever had a family that I wanted to raise my children the way I had

been raised."

The young farmer met Ginny Reichert when, soon after his return, he took a sick cow to the veterinarian's office where she was working. She was the daughter of Othmar and Lorena Reichert, dairy farmers from Cassella, and she married Mike Bensman. The couple has three boys, Alan, 22; Mark, 20 and Doug, 16.

The couple has been farming for a living for more than 20 years and neither Mike nor Ginny has had to work off the farm. Ginny said that she asked her boys on occasion if they wouldn't like for her to go to work somewhere, so they would have more money, but the answer was always, 'no, we like having you here.' Bensman said his family has a good life, and he wouldn't change anything, because he likes being outside and being his own boss. He has a great feeling of job satisfaction, but he said he is worried about the future of dairy farming.

"Dairy is terrible right now," he said. "Government policies of too many imports and not enough exports have hurt the industry, and huge Dutch dairies are over producing milk, driving prices down even more. Prices are at levels they were at 15 to 20 years ago." The Bensmans sell their milk to



ON THE FARM -- Mike and Ginny Bensman feel very fortunate to be able to live the life they love on their farm, next door to Minster. Dairy farming as a way of life may be threatened by

the Reiter Dairy in Springfield. They milk about 75 cows.

"It is a good life," said Ginny. "I do most of the milking, and Mike and the boys tend to the rest. We farm about 400 acres, and over the years, we settled into a routine that got us up and out at about 4:30 a.m., so we could be back in the house to have breakfast as a family before the kids went to school. We milk again at 4:30 in the afternoon, and we are done early most days. We like it, and it suits us. We decided we didn't want to get so big we had to use outside help to do the farming,

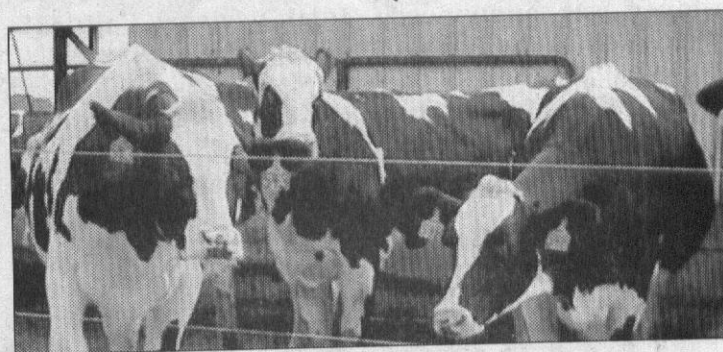
and we haven't changed our minds about that, but the boys are growing up now, and farming isn't looking like it will continue to be a good living. It's kind of sad."

Min-Edge Farm is in the unique position of being the eastern edge of Minster, and the Bensmans try very hard to be good neighbors to the villagers. They manage their animal waste by injecting the farm's manure directly into the soil rather than spreading it, and they maintain their farm in picture perfect condition.

Still, Bensman doesn't think his farm will last for

big business and government policies, but according to the Bensmans, it's still a great way of life, and the only one they would choose.

(Photos by Susan Fox)



another generation.

"We're too close to town," he said. "The town will have to grow somewhere. When I was a kid, there wasn't anything between us and Main Street. We have already sold some of the original farm, south and west of here, and Minster has grown into that space."

Still, Bensman is philo-

sophical.

"Everything in life is a learning experience and I was lucky enough figure out that farming was for me, and lucky enough to be able to live the way I wanted to when I got it figured out. I love being outside, and I like living on a farm and being my own boss. A lot of days I even like cows."