



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

DEL FORD: A FARMER AT HEART

Maybe because he didn't spend his childhood on the farm, Del Ford appreciates his adult life in agriculture that much more. "I lost my dad when I was really young, and so we moved to town," he explains. Somehow, the seed of those very early years was planted, and Del grew up hiring out to local farmers. He discovered he especially enjoyed working with livestock.

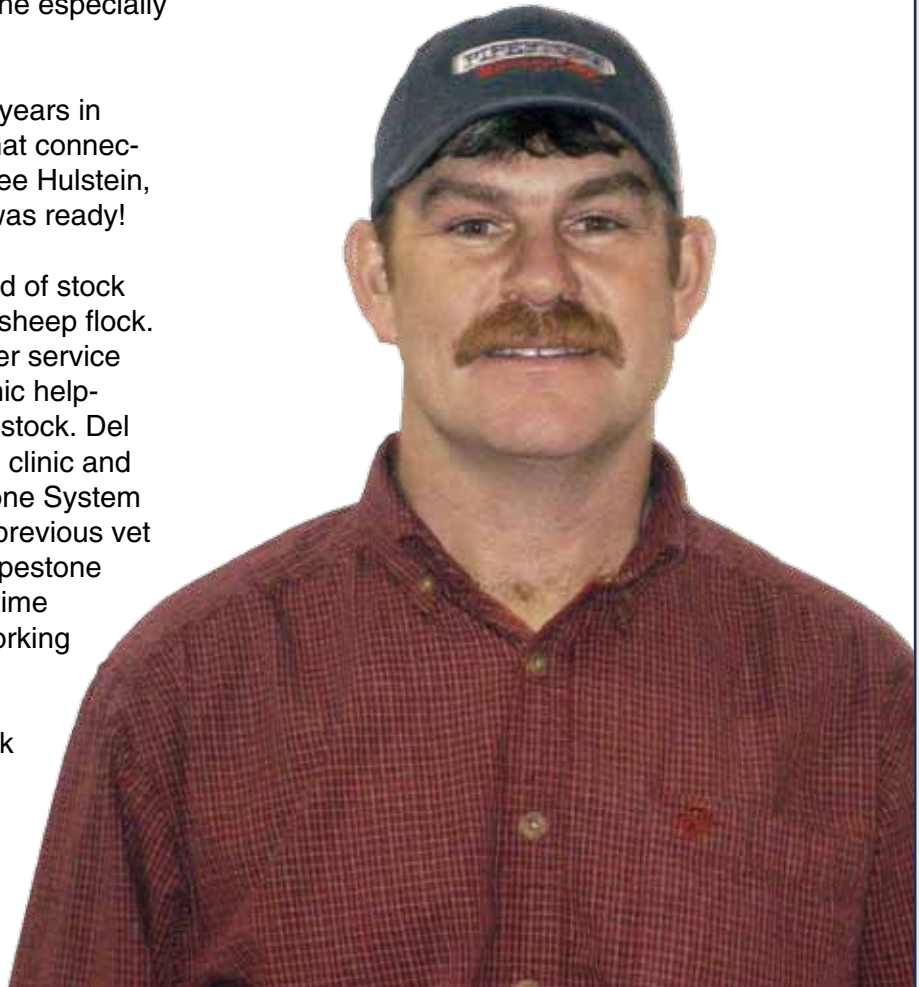
He married Terri and they spent six years in Sioux Falls, but there was always that connection to ag. When his father-in-law, Lee Hulstein, suggested they farm together, Del was ready!

Today, he's a crop farmer with a herd of stock cows and mixed-breed commercial sheep flock. He's also very visible at the customer service counter of Pipestone Veterinary Clinic helping others who share his love of livestock. Del spends most of his workweek at the clinic and the rest delivering pigs from Pipestone System barns to System shareholders. His previous vet clinic duties were centered at the Pipestone Livestock Auction Market as a part-time employee. Now he's happy to be working full-time.

"These are very good people to work with. They're very understanding if you have family functions to attend. In fact, the employees are a family, too. You can tell how well we get along," Del adds, laughing, as his co-workers prove the connection

by offering suggestions for his interview.

Terri Ford works for GrowMark, a distributor of oil products. Their children are Erin, 27, a medical lab technician, and Nicholas, 23, who works with his dad in the family cattle and sheep operation. ■



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B. R. Kerkaert, D.V.M.

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C. W. Vlietstra, D.V.M.

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D. F. Peterschmidt, D.V.M.

B. B. Myers, D.V.M.

A. M. Emme, D.V.M.

DAIRY OWNERS FROM THE NETHERLANDS ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEE “BUY-IN”

When a business encourages employees to emotionally buy in, the goal is shared responsibility, which makes everybody happier at work. “The idea is to give every employee the sense of being his or her own manager,” say Wilfried and Olga Reuvekamp of Hilltop Dairy, LLP in Elkton, SD. “This is a family dairy. We do all we can to create a better climate for our workers.”

These two entrepreneurs work with Pipestone Veterinary Clinic to offer consistent training and information for employees in their big milking operation. The weekly sessions Dr. Curt Vlietstra and Dr. Larry Goelz conduct focus on essential cow care.

As a result of training and buy-in, Dr. Vlietstra bears witness to low employee turnover and improved cow welfare at Hilltop Dairy. “It’s clearly worth the time to teach people what to look for.”

Wilfried loves to work with animals. He grew up on a family dairy farm extending back many generations. Then, in 2006 he and Olga decided to amplify their challenges, moving up from 180 cows in the Netherlands to 2,100 cows in the U.S. They bought an existing dairy in the Elkton area and sold the operation back home.

There weren’t many dairies for sale in this country, but fortunately Olga and Wilfried found a place where they feel comfortable. Olga explains, “Yes, this is a somewhat different culture, but we’re in an area where the ethics and religion are familiar.

“I’m a teacher,” Olga says, “so first I had to be confident of the schools.” Their children are daughter Els, 13, and sons Thijs, 11, and Wim, 9. Olga also checked to ensure the kids’ names didn’t have any hidden meaning in American slang.

BAGGING A BETTER PET FOOD CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

At the Pipestone Vet Clinic, we carry two hypoallergenic foods so Dr. Weber doesn’t play favorites. Clients can choose between either Science Diet Z/D or Purina® HA. “Many pets are allergic to the protein source.

These two hypoallergenic foods offer a chicken-based diet reformulated so the body doesn’t realize it’s ingesting chicken.”

BE A SMART LABEL READER

Clients ask Dr. Weber whether high-grade pet food is worth the expense. She replies, “When you buy lower-quality food, you give your pet more filler and fewer fatty acids. Naturally, we have to pay attention to cost, but honestly, you’ll keep your pet healthier with a higher quality food.

“A higher quality food results in a lower stool volume as more of the consumed food is digested and utilized by the body,” Dr. Weber continues. “Fillers

aren’t digestible and pass through the digestive system unchanged. Shoe leather, for example, is 21% protein but that doesn’t mean dogs should consume it.”

If your pet doesn’t require a special formula for allergies or other health issues, you can gauge food quality by scanning the label. The message you want to find on your pet’s food is this one: “Animal feeding tests using Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) procedures....” Locate the words “feeding tests” or “feeding trial” along with those AAFCO initials and you’re buying a food that’s been comparison-tested on real animals before it hits the shelves. The phrase you’d rather not see is this: “Formulated to meet AAFCO standards,” which tells you the formula has not been

extensively tested.

If you are going to be changing your pet’s diet, do it gradually over a period of 2-3 weeks. Mixing the old and new foods can acclimate them to the diet resulting in fewer cases of diarrhea. ■



MAX TAUBERT AND ROXY



WILFRIED REUVEKAMP AND DR. CURT VLIETSTRA DEVELOPED A WEEKLY EMPLOYEE TRAINING PROGRAM TOGETHER THAT ULTIMATELY IMPROVED COW HEALTH AND WELFARE.

Wilfried adds, “If you would watch TV in Western Europe, you’d never hear much about South Dakota.” Even without much advance fanfare, the state lived up to their hopes, though. Of course, there were moments of culture-shock: calculating the distance to Brookings, for instance. (Back in the Netherlands almost anything they needed to buy was within biking distance.) But they realized the kids

were adjusting nicely. “We went back to the Netherlands last year at Christmas, and in the airport our daughter asked to call her friends—her South Dakota friends—to hear what they were doing on New Year’s Eve,” Wilfried says.

In addition to cultural adjustments, there was a different milking style to learn. Wilfried’s dairy in Europe relied on robotic milkers; here the method is a carousel parlor that

handles 40 cows at a time. Manning the constantly turning platform and feeding, bedding, and caring for the cows requires 12 human employees, but no robots.

Olga leads a tour of the milking parlor, talking with workers as they perform pre-dip and cleaning tasks before attaching milkers. Once a cow makes the complete rotation, she steps off the circling carousel and is directed through a sorting gate—either back to the general population or to

special treatment.

Wilfried explains how a computerized chip on the cow’s ear tag signals whether she’ll be pregnancy tested or sorted for a health treatment. After the automated system separates a cow from the herd, workers tap their training from the Vet Clinic to confidently perform their task.

TRAINING BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

Every week, Dr. Vlietstra covers a cow-care topic with two selected herdsmen. Through training, he’s seen all the employees develop confidence in their own abilities to spot health concerns. Those sessions also provide other good outcomes. “We find out what individual workers are good at and what they like to do,” Wilfried comments. “We’ve given them more control over their own workday and more responsibility. As a result, herd health has improved!”

The next level of training will be monthly meetings for all dairy staff. Dr. Vlietstra and Dr. Goelz plan to schedule monthly topics and recruit outside experts to present. They’ll also invite workers from a neighboring dairy to the spacious conference room at Hilltop.

It’s another layer aimed at buy-in and a deepening of trust in the veterinarians. “Our herdsmen now know to call Curt directly,” Wilfried begins—and just at that moment an employee taps on the door and motions to Dr. Vlietstra.

As the veterinarian and the dairy employee confer in the hallway, Wilfried continues, “See what I mean? My employee didn’t need to ask me his question first, because he’s established a relationship with our veterinarian.” ■



OLGA REUVEKAMP MAINTAINS A FACEBOOK PAGE FOR THE DAIRY, WHERE SHE INTERACTS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND FAR-FLUNG FRIENDS. SHE’S PART OF A DAIRY MOM NETWORK AND HOSTS TOURS FOR SCHOOL GROUPS.

OTHER PET FOOD BUYING CAUTIONS FROM DR. WEBER

Don't feed pets raw food.

- Raw diets are currently popular. One is called BARF (bones and raw food).
- 80% of uncooked diets are contaminated, which can make people and pets sick.
- Preparing raw pet food is an especially serious concern for people with reduced immunity.

Don't feed cats and dogs the same food.

- Cat food contains taurine which is an essential amino acid that cats require for appropriate cardiac function. Without it, they can develop heart failure.
- Conversely, dog food often does not contain taurine, which will harm cats.

The terms "light" and "lite" on pet food labels can be misleading.

- Those foods could still contain a huge range of calories.

And what about the word "meat" on canned foods?

- If the label says "meat" the food must be 95% meat.
- "Meat recipe" or "meat formula" requires at least 25% meat.
- "Flavored," as in chicken-flavored, requires just enough meat for the pet to recognize.



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PET FEATURE

BAGGING A BETTER PET FOOD

She's possibly the softest short-haired dog you'll ever touch, but Roxy's rich coat hides sensitive skin. Tami and Bob Taubert of Pipestone could hear their new dog (acquired from the Humane Society two years ago) endlessly scratching. "She sleeps in our room, and I could tell she was itching all night. It's difficult to know how much that bothered Roxy, but her problem worried me," Tami reports.

Dr. Nicole Weber suspected a food allergy. "We changed her food to a Science Diet formula for dogs with allergies and listened for the sound of scratching," says Tami. "Once Roxy seemed better we started re-feeding her previous food again. She began itching again, which indicated a food allergy to something in her old diet."

That was proof enough. Now back on Hill's® Science Diet Z/D for good, Roxy spends less time worrying about her skin problems and more time focused on her family. Max Taubert, who will be four in March, has three sisters: Morgan, 12, Mara, 10, and Marli, 7.

Dogs and cats can be allergic to many things. Tami says Roxy's prescribed low-dose steroid combats the unknown

factors. According to Dr. Weber, Roxy's case isn't unusual. But allergies that can be traced to food are sometimes easier to recognize and can be controlled with a diet change.

"In winter, when there are fewer seasonal factors at work, the time is right to do a food trial. Just switching to another supermarket brand isn't enough, since the allergy-causing component could be found in another brand, too. A dog or cat owner should introduce a hypoallergenic pet ration."

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PIPESTONE VET CLINIC STOCKS SPECIFIC FOODS FOR PETS WITH PARTICULAR DISEASES OR AGE-RELATED CONDITIONS. YOU WON'T FIND AS MANY HELPFUL POSSIBILITIES IN YOUR SUPER-STORE PET AISLE.