Between mountains and the big city you would expect to find suburbs and countryside. The fact is, you will find something better, a 94 head dairy farm named Sunrise Ridge Farm.

Todd Frescura, his family and Sunrise Ridge sit at the west base of the Laurel Mountains in Southwestern Pennsylvania on a piece of gently rolling valley that leads to Pittsburgh. Established in 1999, Sunrise Ridge houses a little bit of everything with an American Lineback and a representative from each breed except Milking Shorthorn, with Ayrshires leading the way.

The 103-acre farm is owned by Roy Kemerer, Todd’s grandfather, and has been under land preservation since the mid 90’s. Twenty of the acres are pasture, woodland and under the homestead with the remaining 83 being used for cropping. Todd also rents an additional 150 acres for alfalfa, grass hay, silage corn and small grain production.

Properly Named

Starting chores each day with the help of the rising sun is a benefit that some farmers may not have, but Todd gets to enjoy it on a regular basis. It all starts with the neighboring mountains hiding the sun from Todd as he begins his chores, until the point where it rises over the ridge and shines into the east windows of the barn.

“I was thinking about naming the farm by using my wife’s and my names, but the morning sun and those mountains gave me quite a lot of influence each day,” explained Todd. “Seeing the sun rise each day over Chestnut Ridge in the mountains, simply put, led to Sunrise Ridge.”

Ayrshires Through The Years

Ayrshires have become the majority breed in the Sunrise Ridge herd with a big push coming from Todd because of his showing and owning them over the years. The farm and homestead has always had Ayrshires present ever since his Grandfather started the herd in the 40’s. When Todd took over the farm, he added to the herd with a focus in Ayrshires and Holsteins. Todd had Ayrshires in his Grandfather’s herd for 4-H projects, so having them be a big part of his herd now is nothing new to him.

Pitching In

Even though Todd handles the farm by himself, he has plenty of help when it is needed. His wife Marla, who is a 1st grade teacher, helps out when she can while Todd’s Grandmother, Thelma, helps by watching Dante, their 2-year-old son. Haymaking is usually not a problem when the family helps out.

Todd’s cousin Greg Johnson and his wife, Jodie along with their three kids, Austin, Brady and Coner, pitch in when they can with the small jobs and baling. Helping milk cows from time to time is Jackie Cross, Todd’s sister, along with her husband Jim. Their two kids, Ali and Cody, also are involved at the farm with some of the smaller jobs.

However, the majority of the help comes during the summer when seasonal farm hands are at the farm. Tyler Ferrari and Cody Torock work during the summer when they are not in school and also show 4-H and high school projects out of Sunrise-Ridge. Tyler has worked for four years and is off to college this year, while Cody is in 7th grade and is just starting. So Todd is happy he is getting a new hand with this possibly being Tyler’s last year.

Herd Care

The milking herd is housed in a stall barn. The 65 stalls, 20 of which are new Tyrell stalls, are bedded with sawdust with additional mats planned for the future. When not in the barn, the cows are on the farm’s pasture. The current 40 mature head are milked twice daily, using the farm’s four-unit pipeline milking system that leads to a brand new bulk tank.

A tunnel ventilation system to assist the current fans is also a goal of Todd’s to make the cows more comfortable. The heifers are housed in a loose housing heifer barn on a manure pack with a concrete scrape alley.
The calves also have a separate barn and to help during the cold season, they wear calf coats to keep warm.

The 18 Ayrshires within the milking herd have an average of 17,547M 3.7% 643F 3.1% 549P at an average age of 3-09 with a cull rate of 24 percent.

“I am very proud of the fact of having only two DA’s in the six years we have been here,” Todd said. In addition, the herd has experienced no ketosis and no Milk Fever in the past four years and reached a level III Johnes status in 2005.

Dairy Is Dairy

Being a “Dairyman” and not a “Dairyfarmer” is one thing that Todd is not shy about communicating to people. By the plans he has for the farm, one can see this very easily. He would like to have someone else handle the spraying and manure hauling and have all of his crops rented out and into no-till. With Todd’s ultimate goal to have more time to devote to the herd and to become a “Dairyman”.

One of Todd’s goals is to have a herd that could offer more as a whole by hitting the strengths of the breeds. “The Ayrshires are by far the efficient ones in the barn, the Swiss add components to the herd while the Holstein are the milk producers.”

Todd would eventually like to have a dozen milking from each breed to help make the herd better in all areas. He sees herd management being a huge part of dairying in the future because keeping track of how all your cows are doing is the best way to improve their life and the farm in return.

Young Sires Are The Way To Go

Todd strongly feels that more people need to use young sires because of the potential they hold, especially as a service bull on heifers to get a better conception rate. “The nice thing about using young sires is that we can improve the type of animals and get better pedigrees because they are bred from top bulls. The chance of getting a complete dud is next to none even with the fact that it is sometimes luck or like a lottery,” Todd added.

Todd recently purchased semen from Raven and Shipley to use on his herd. They already have three Special K milking daughters, a LaSapiniere Dinomire daughter and two 4-Year-Old Brow-Ayr Trident Griffey daughters where the bull was used as a young sire. Currently, Sunrise Ridge’s young sire usage is 50 percent.

“It would be nice to have a program with incentives to use young sires. If I can get an awesome pedigree heifer from a young sire, I’m sure going to give it a try.”

Breed For The Future…Now

Todd feels that, as a breed, everyone needs to work on the age of heifers at first calf. He would like to see more breeders freshening their heifers at 20-22 months. “We need to get heifers bred in a timely manner. I prefer not to see a 2-Year-Old or a fall yearling that isn’t bred. When I go to a sale, I want to see more younger animals with an udder that has dropped.”

Sunrise Ridge Francis, EX-90
1-09 305d 18,218M 4.2% 753F 3.0% 546P
3-01 305d 27,120M 3.7% 1004F 3.1% 833P

Urban development, Not A Problem

Being near Pittsburgh and four miles from the Arnold Palmer Regional Airport, aka. the Latrobe Airport, development is on the minds of the Frescura family. The nice thing is that it is not a bad thing for them. “There is potential for a big market expansion for us in terms of dairying and farm production with the growth of urban development,” Todd said. The local airport has direct flights to and from Detroit, so in terms of visitors and selling animals the farm could not be in a better situation.

“If you can get to Detroit, you can get to Latrobe and I can meet you at the airport for the five minute drive to the farm. We would like to see more possibilities arise out of this, so we are keeping our minds on what we can do to take advantage of whatever issues come up.”

Dante Frescura gets some practice driving a tractor.

“I am very proud of the fact of having only two DA’s in the six years we have been here,”
- Todd Frescura, Sunrise Ridge Farm

Back 70 acres of the farm against Chestnut Ridge.