

One hundred and fifty births in ninety days

Claremont's Silo Hill Farms is a large cow-calf operation



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By CHRIS SHANAHAN
 As manager of one of Durham Region's largest cattle operations, Kevan Gretton oversees the birth of more than 200 calves each year.

And though it has become a fairly routine procedure, he and hired hands Pete McKiver and John Elliott never fail to experience a few anxious moments every time another precious cargo enters the world.

"With the industry the way it is today you can't afford to lose one (calf)," according to Mr. Gretton, who runs the sprawling Silo Hill Farms spread northeast of Claremont.

Of a total of the 210 calves, 150 are born during a period of 90 days in late winter and early spring, and another 60 during the months of August and September.

Mr. Gretton rotates with the farm's two laborers to keep an around-the-clock watch on cows ready to give birth.

When the animals are six to eight months old, Silo Hill sells them to feedlots where the animals are fed out to a market weight of about 1,200 lbs.

"We're the first step, then it goes to the feedlot operators. They finish them out to steers and then they (the cattle) go to be slaughtered at Toronto Stockyards," Mr. Gretton explained.

Silo Hill, owned by Toronto business executive W.P. Wilder, ranks among the area's largest cow-calf operations.

"There aren't many farms left in Ontario with more than 200

cows. We are basically one of the largest in Durham Region," Mr. Gretton claimed. The farm's stock of 210 cows includes 60 purebred Simmentals, with the remainder being cross-bred Simmentals and Charlois. There's also a breeding herd of five bulls.

Silo Hill is suitable for cow-calf purposes because the acreage consists mainly of grass and hay. In winter, cattle seek shelter in the property's reforested bush area and are brought to one of three barns for calving only.

The 29-year-old Gretton gained much of his agricultural training in his native England, where he was raised on a farm. He moved to Canada at age 10 but later returned to his homeland for post-secondary education.

Although working and living at someone else's farm, the Silo Hill manager runs it as if it were his own.

"It's a really tight industry right now. There's not a lot of leeway between profit and loss," explained Mr. Gretton. Still, efficient management techniques can yield respectable profits.

"The only way to make money is to be more efficient," Mr. Gretton said, noting that steer prices haven't gone up much in recent years while operating costs have continued to increase.

Research

Silo Hill is now experimenting with French Salers, which are bred with Simmentals and Charlois to hopefully produce a more

efficient cow that's less expensive to raise.

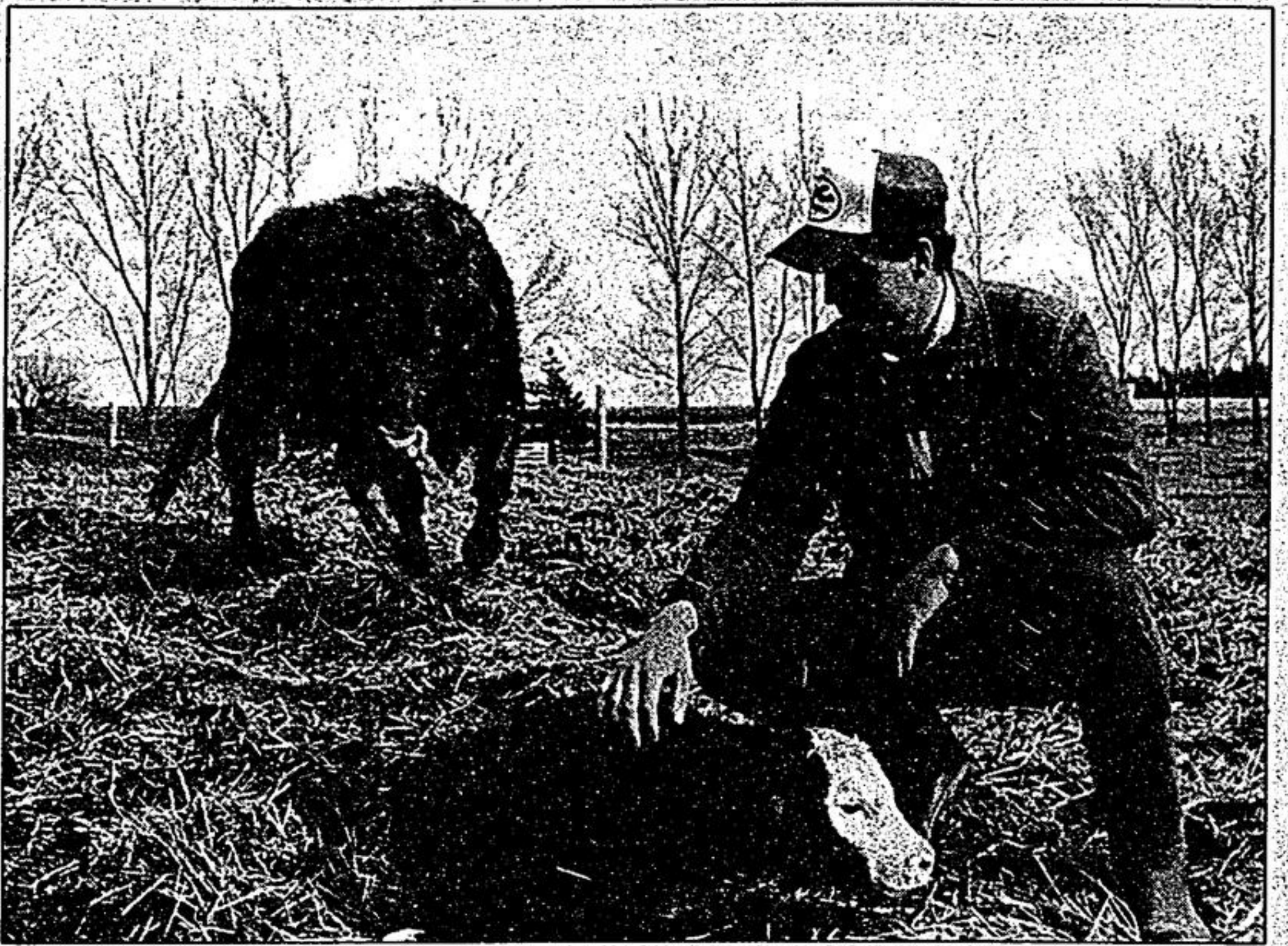
As part of an on-going betterment program, about 20 to 30 purebred Simmentals are artificially inseminated to add to the gene pool.

The R.R. 1, Claremont farm is

also involved in a bull testation program overseen by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Test results stored at Guelph's Red Meat Centre provide genetic information that enable breeders to select the best, most fertile bulls, according to Mr. Gretton,

who lives in one of the farm's residences with wife Kim and their sons Christopher, 3, and Scott, five months. He's a director with both the Ontario County Cattlemen's Association and Ontario County Beef Herd Improvement Club.



Silo Hill Farms manager Kevan Gretton comforts a newborn calf as a cow looks on just minutes after giving birth. The Pickering farm is located on Sideline 12, north of Durham Region Rd. 5. —Chris Shanahan

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Jr. Farmers offer varied activities

By CATHY WILSON
 Farm Management Specialist
 Region of York

For about the cost of a record album, young people in Ontario can buy memberships in an organization that will give them a whole year of social activities and personal challenge.

The Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario offers its members, ranging in age from 15 to 29, a wide variety of interesting activities including travel, sports, cultural and leadership training programs.

Junior Farmers is an entirely self-governed organization, offering its members the opportunity to take on leadership roles, in the local clubs as well as in the Provincial Association. Towards this end, a variety of programs are organized as educational opportunities, ranging from a week-long leadership training camp to executive training workshops.

Many elected officials and leaders in the agricultural community credit their leadership training in Junior Farmers for their later accomplishments.

Of course, a vital organization of young people calls for a large portion of social activity. Besides community betterment projects that benefit the area as a whole, local clubs organize many events each year for members including sports competitions and dances.

The Provincial Association also carries out a number of activities for members over the course of the year. There are Winter and Summer Games, Culturama, (a one-act play festival, debating, public speaking and slide presentation competitions); and a Sing-Swing, (a festival of music and dance competitions).

If travelling to new places; meeting new people and learning about other parts of the world interest you, Junior Farmers can offer travel scholarships to other Canadian Provinces, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Western Europe. Junior Farmers also send delegates regularly to conferences and workshops for rural youth, in many parts of the globe.

The reason for joining Junior Farmers are as wide and varied as the membership itself, and the best part is that the programs and activities are constantly changing and improving to meet the needs of the members.

For personal development, social activity and a valuable learning experience, no organization can compare with the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario.

The contact people are: Kelly Coates, Sharon Club, (473-5231); Brian Lewis, Unionville Club, (640-3687); and Dan Fieldhouse, Vellore Club, (851-5309).

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