

Dairy farms were once a common sight in Thorold

NEPHEWS BUY FROM UNCLE TO CONTINUE SUMMERS FAMILY FARM

BY DANNI GRESKO
STAFF

There once was a time when the dairy farmer was a common sight in the city of Thorold.

Today there are less than a handful.

Summers Farms, located on Beaverdams Road, is one of the last remaining dairy farms in the city. It has been in the family since Alexander Summers bought the land in 1796.

The success of Summers Farms, however, has been threatened by the changing state of the agricultural industry.

Factors such as skyrocketing fuel prices have affected the cost of fertilizers and fuel, two much-needed resources to sustain any successful farm.

Alton Summers, 71, recently sold his farm to nephews Lenny and Barry Summers. Since the farm lies within land protected by **Greenbelt** legislation, the property will never be allowed to be sold off as residential land.

"If we ever decide to sell it off, it must be sold as a farm, which is going to be very hard," he said.

For now it will be up to Summers' nephews to sustain the

farm into the future, but with the state of farming in peril he isn't sure what is in store for them.

Summers said he has seen the industry fade over the years. He remembers many small family farms which have since disappeared.

"You need to have a big farm to make a living nowadays," he said. "Especially if you're a dairy farmer."

To sell milk in Canada, farmers are governed by a quota system, which allows them to produce a certain amount of milk each day.

Summers estimates most dairy farms in Niagara have somewhere around 60-70 cows — a smaller farm just couldn't make a profit

because of the restraints of the quota system.

Generally, a dairy farmer milks the first cow of the day by 6 a.m., there's another in the late afternoon and the last one occurs around 10 p.m.

With 80 cows on Summers Farms to milk, that's a lot of long hours put into one day.

It is a life that can require 17-hour days, seven days a week.

"That's why my son works at Dofasco," Summers joked.

Summers said at his age he

should be retired, but is still working to sustain the farm, while his son, in his 40s, could retire next year.

"But that's the life of a farmer," he said.

Summers, who will continue to help maintain the farm after his nephews take over, still believes the future of farming at stake.

Factors such as cheap imports from foreign countries have hurt the agricultural sector.

"I see more and more imports coming in and I don't think the public is really concerned about it," he said.

"We don't (grow) fruit so it doesn't affect us directly, but it is very concerning," he said.

Summers and his wife, Diane, think that the public should be more aware of the drastic change in imported produce and how it directly affects local farmers.

They would like to see more awareness on the issue.

For now, the Summers' family is focusing on the farm and keeping positive.

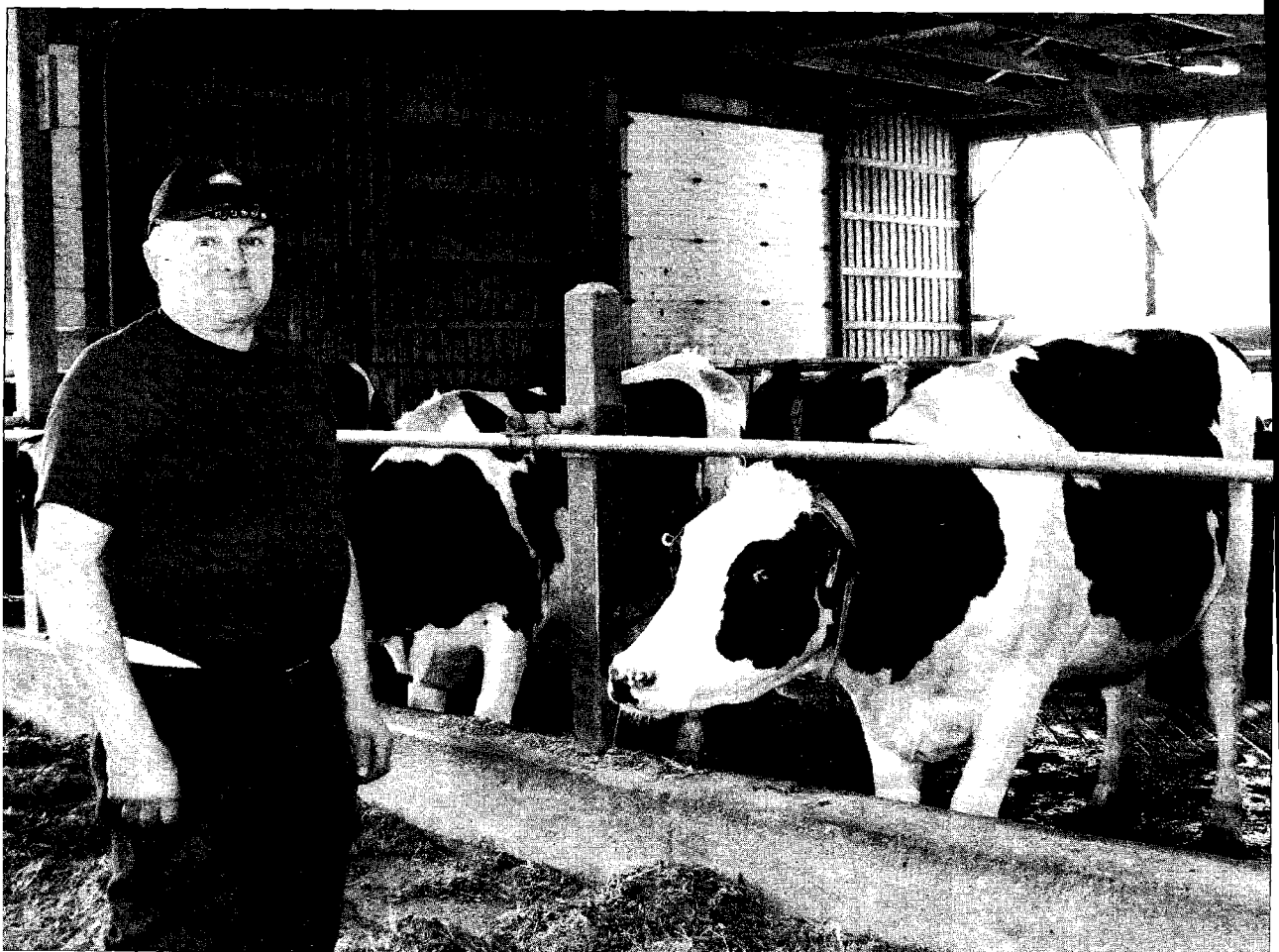
They are hoping for a prosperous summer season ahead.

"The grass is getting green, the spring is here and we're hoping it's going to be a great year."

I see more and more imports coming in and I don't think the public is really concerned about it.

— Alton Summers





Alton Summers, 71, stands with a few of the 80 cows on Summers Farms, located on Beaverdams Road in Thorold. He is one of the last remaining dairy farmers in Thorold. Alton, who is unsure about the local farming industry's future, recently sold his seven-generation farm to his nephews Lenny and Barry Summers.