

On Being Barn Head

Farm Page



MAX '10 <right> PREPARES TO SHOW CALEB '11 WHERE THOSE MILKERS ATTACH, JUST AFTER DAWN ON A WEEKDAY MORNING.

Max '11 rolls out of his Gray House dormitory before 6 a.m. six days a week to gather Elm Lea Farm's cows for milking. He's the AM Barn Head, which is what we call the student boss, and is responsible for managing a crew of 6-10 students through the morning barn chores.

"When I first did Barn as a freshman I had no idea what I was getting into. But now it's like second nature," says Max.

There are roughly 35 cows that need milking and feeding, another 30 or so young stock and beefers, plus a small animal barn chock full of sheep, chickens, pigs, and turkeys that need tending every morning.

"Teaching someone new to the barn how to load a wheelbarrow full of manure is more fun than putting lemon juice on a paper cut," says Max, who has introduced more than a few students to the business end of a shovel during his barn tenure.

Kidding aside, Barn Head is a real job with real responsibilities. And the students understand this, which is why we've had record low bacteria counts in our milk for so many years in a row. "It's a direct result of the level of care our animals receive. The students take good care of their cows," says Farm Manager Pete Stickney.

Max is a skilled enough farm hand that he spent part of last summer milking cows at Mermaid Farm on Martha's Vineyard. He's actually so squared away that the farm boss was able to take a break for the first summer in five years. "It was pretty cool having the place to myself," says Max.

Being AM Barn Head has its own challenges. "If something goes wrong they all look at me." But it also has its benefits. "People do what I tell them to do. That doesn't happen anywhere else in a teenager's day."

As work programs go, Putney is more the exception than the rule in that student jobs are essential to the ongoing operation of the school. If Max doesn't show up to work or do his job right, which is to make sure his crew shows up and does their job right, the health of the animals and the quality of The Putney School's food will suffer. Barn Heads take their work seriously. The proof is in the bacteria count.