



"The Newspaper That Cares About Rural Life"

# Country Market

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The Country Today SECTION

## FARM POWER

Clark County man stands among nation's strongest

Carl Foemmel relaxed in his house the morning of Oct. 23, after milking the 54 cows in one of his family farm's barns near Chili in Clark County. It was one of the few times he's been able to relax in the past few weeks, knowing he wouldn't be heading to long hours of working out in a gym after a day of farm chores.

He deserved the rest. After all, he'd just won a national Strongman professional qualifying event during the weekend in Louisville, Ky., and would be taking a planned week or so from his training with everything from barbells to car bumpers.

With the competition's win, the 25-year-old powerhouse — he stands 6 feet 4 inches tall and is a lean 293 pounds — earned his professional Strongman certification card, which will allow him to compete toward a possible World's Strongest Man title.

"It's been a dream of mine for a long time to compete in the World's Strongest Man competition," Mr. Foemmel said. "This put me a step closer to it."

But first he'll have to milk cows and do other dairy-farming chores. And he'll have to continue to train hard in weight rooms and gyms with his 49-year-old training partner, Kevin Grapp of Neillsville.

Doing the farm work and then working out at a national class — and potentially world-class — level in weight rooms is a difficult schedule to maintain, a fact Mr. Foemmel isn't afraid to admit. But he also said he believes having to do dairy-farm chores and then lifting gives him an edge over his nonfarming competition.

Some of the lifts and carries required in the competition are similar to some of the chores Mr. Foemmel grew up with on the farm. There's even one called the "farmer's carry," which replicates carrying a heavy object in each hand — something like carrying bales, but with much more weight involved.

"I think it makes all the difference in the world to be farming and then work out in the gym on top of that," he said. "If something comes up where I have to miss a workout some night, I don't feel too guilty because I know I've probably already worked my butt off throughout the day."

His family milks about 50 cows in another barn, and there are enough family members working the farm to

Story by Scott Schultz



allow Mr. Foemmel to get away for competitions.

"That's the nice thing about working with your family like I do; I can get away for a day or two, if I have to," he said.

Mr. Foemmel knows he can't miss the intense training to compete at the level he was at in Louisville. He'd been at similar competitions in the past, but minor injuries or illnesses kept him from competing at his peak.

The workout time is at a premium, he said, and has to be done with intensity and with motivation. That's where Mr. Grapp comes in. A radio station owner, Mr. Grapp has been lifting weights for many years. Mr. Foemmel's wife, Nona, knew about

Mr. Grapp's gym workouts and told Mr. Foemmel the two men should work together. A contact was made, and Mr. Grapp became a person who keeps Mr. Foemmel on his training regimen.

"There are days when I don't feel like pushing so hard, but Kevin's there to keep me going," Mr. Foemmel said.

Mr. Grapp said he's had other workout partners, but none as dedicated as Mr. Foemmel. And certainly, none of his previous workout partners have been nearly as strong as Mr. Foemmel.

"We just really work well together; we both love the game and love to stay fit," Mr. Grapp said. "He's absolutely the strongest man I know."

Fitness plays a great role in the men's motivation in the gym. Mr. Grapp said people's amazement when they hear about Mr. Foemmel's weight makes their workouts worthwhile, no matter the results Mr. Foemmel might have in competitions.

"People can't believe he weighs 290 (pounds)," Mr. Grapp said. "That just proves the point that there's a lot packed into a pound of



Above: Carl Foemmel of Chili recently practiced with an Atlas stone under the watch of his workout partner, Kevin Grapp of Neillsville. Left: Mr. Foemmel put his workouts to use last weekend in a "log press" during a Strongman competition in Louisville, Ky.

muscle."

Mr. Grapp said the regimen also helps keep them focused on some areas — most importantly on their family and professional lives.

Mr. Foemmel played football at Marshfield Senior High School and then for a while at UW-Eau Claire. His competitive drive wasn't ready to stop, so he started exploring his Strongman competition dreams.

It's just that drive of the competition that really keeps me competing with the Strongman events," Mr. Foemmel said.

All the work paid off at the Louisville competition. There, he didn't win any of the five events — but he placed second in four of them.

"I feel good about winning that way," he said. "Some of the guys had a specialty, but I feel good that I was up there in all the events."

Mr. Foemmel's closest competitor failed to close the points gap between them during the log press; the competitor lifted the 450-pound log over his head once, and Mr. Foemmel did it seven times.

He said his best performance was in the "dead-lift medley." In that event, competitors were timed to see how quickly they could make a series of lifts involving a 450-pound vehicle axel, a 600-pound frame, a 650-pound barbell and a car's back-end. He went through the lifts in 19.3 seconds.

The focus Mr. Foemmel and Mr. Grapp work on during their workouts was important during the competition, Mr. Foemmel said. Reflecting on the competition, Mr. Foemmel said there was nothing but the lifts and carries on his mind.

**"I could hear some of the sounds there — the people cheering and the music — but you pretty much can't think about anything else when you're competing."**

— Carl Foemmel, national Strongman qualifying event winner

"I could hear some of the sounds there — the people cheering and the music — but you pretty much can't think about anything else when you're competing," he said.

The worrying was left to Mrs. Foemmel, who accompanied her husband and Mr. Grapp to Louisville.

"I'm glad he did it for his sake, but I get really nervous for him while he's compet-

ing," Mrs. Foemmel said. "I got really light-headed during the Atlas stone competition (in which competitors carry a series of large stones and place them onto pedestals)."

But the competition's done for now, and for Mr. Foemmel, it's back to concentrating on the farm work; it's time for corn harvesting. But he won't get too far from the intense workout regimen. After taking a few days off, Mr. Foemmel will start a maintenance regimen and start looking for his next competition — this time professionally sanctioned Strongman card in-hand.

"When I find one, I'll start increasing the intensity again and, about six weeks before the contest, I'll really start pushing," he said.

But first, he'll be sure his cows are milked.



Submitted photos

Above: Clark County dairy farmer Carl Foemmel spends many hours in a weight room after he's done with farm chores, with hopes of competing in the World's Strongest Man competition. Right: Mr. Foemmel and another competitor pulled trucks during last weekend's Strongman competition in Louisville, Ky. Mr. Foemmel won the competition, and with it, the right to compete professionally.

