

Pa's Biggest Feedlot

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For ten months out of the year, this water-filled trough in the foreground is brimming with brewers grains. The feed material is piped directly to the feedlot from the Pennco Distillery, which is next door to the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company. The distillery closes down for two months every summer for vacation, repairs, etc.

near Newmanstown. Then, as now, one of the principal feed ingredients for animals in the lot were the brewers grains which are a byproduct of the distillery operation. Over the years, Foulke built up the operation until he had a 3000-head capacity. Two years ago, after half-a-century in the cattle business, Foulke retired, selling his business to Dr. Barry Hershone.

Hershone is a psychologist and wealthy businessman who owns the Mitchell School and the Main Line Day School in Philadelphia. Hershone has been in the cattle business since he started a cow-calf operation on his "gentleman's farm" outside Brickerville in Lancaster County. He's the majority stockholder in the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company.

With Hatcher's help, Hershone hopes to build the feedlot's capacity to 5000 head at a time. Of the 5000 head he'd like to have in the feedlot, Hershone wants to own 1000 himself, through his Mitchell Farms subsidiary, and feed 4000 head for customers. In a brochure describing the Lebanon Valley Cattle operation,



Mel Dozer oversees yard operations for the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company, which is reportedly

Pennsylvania's biggest feedlot. Dozer has been with the operation since its inception during World War II.

potential customers are shown how they can become cattle feeders without ever setting foot on a feedlot. Lebanon Valley will buy the cattle, fatten them at the rate of two-and-a-half to three pounds a day, sell them after 175 to 200 days, and turn the profit over to the customer.

The brochure also says, "When the cattle are received at the feed yard, they will be weighed, vaccinated, inspected and branded with a brand number assigned to the customer, and then placed in pens where they will be kept separate from other customer's cattle until they are marketed."

How, we asked Hatcher, could an operation like this work in a period of gyrating prices for feeders, finished cattle and, especially, feed? "We don't really worry about the feed cost," Hatcher replied, smiling again. "Because we use horticultural byproducts, we can tell a customer what it'll cost him to feed his cattle for the next six months."

Horticultural byproducts? "Like brewers grains," Hatcher explained. "These are the residues left over when canneries, breweries - even bakeries - produce food for human consumption. Our byproducts feeding program is based on a 1969 study by Dr. Lowell Wilson at Penn State. I feel that the byproducts are actually more digestible than uprocessed corn. We get about an eight-to-one feed to gain ratio, we have healthy cattle, and our feed is a lot cheaper than \$3 or \$4 corn."

"How much cheaper?" we asked. "A lot cheaper." Smile. Contacted at his Penn State office, Dr. Lowell Wilson said he was familiar with the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company. "They're operating under an excellent concept," Wilson said. "They're using good feeds and they're making money. Actually, they're recycling wastes, and I think this is a technique we're going to be hearing more about in the years ahead."

Wilson said he didn't necessarily agree that the byproducts were more digestible than corn, but he did say they were at least equivalent to a high quality forage. Wilson noted that

there are other Pennsylvania feeders using byproducts. Centre County's Rockview Correctional Institute, for example, has a 220-cow dairy-beef herd that gets about three-fourths of its winter diet from cannery wastes.

A healthy chunk of Pennsylvania's apple pomace - the matter that's left after apples are made into sauce or juice - is fed to cattle, Wilson said. In his study, he also had good results feeding processing wastes of tomatoes, potatoes, peas and sweet corn. Mushroom processing wastes are another possibility, although Wilson said he never fed any of that material.

We asked Wilson how much these byproducts cost the cattlemen who are using them for feed. "Nothing, usually," he said. "Some companies might charge a little, but usually, the feeder can pick it up just for the cost of transporting it."

Sounds like free feed, but it's really not. Lebanon Valley has a fleet of dump trailers on the road 24 hours a day, picking up byproducts from processing plants as far away as 100 miles. "When they're in the middle of canning season, the canneries often want the material picked up at three or four in the morning. And that's when we pick it up," Hatcher said.

Besides the trucks and drivers, the company has half-a-million dollars invested in equipment to process the byproducts once they arrive at the feedlots. There's a huge hammermill and a separator in one building to grind up waste and to separate paper, metal and other trash from the byproducts. Dryer parts are standing in a field, waiting to be assembled. The dryers will be needed, Hatcher said, because some of the byproducts are too wet when

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Tucked away behind a hill in back of the Pennco Distillery is the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company, reportedly Pennsylvania's biggest feedlot.



A front-end loader is used to fill feed wagons at the Lebanon Valley Cattle Company. The wagons deliver the horticultural byproduct feed to the company's 1200 head. The number of cattle on feed now is down somewhat because of marketing conditions, but Jerry Hatcher, president, says they expect soon to be operating again at their full 3000-head capacity.



A giant hammermill is the first step in treating horticultural byproducts before they're fed to cattle. Fifty-pound hammers crush the material into a more digestible form.