

The dairy cow is a modern animal

By **DEBBIE CLAYTON**
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NEWARK, Del. — Back before Delaware was known as the First State, there were no handsome black and white cows to complement the green and gold pastures of the countryside. But then there was no such thing as a dairy cow either.

"Until about the middle of the 19th century, nobody distinguished between meat and milk cows," says Joanne Passmore, a former University of Delaware assistant extension agricultural editor who is now writing a book on agriculture in Delaware. "They just milked the cows until the milk stopped and then began fattening them up for meat."

Since there was no refrigeration or transportation in those days, a dairy business would have been a complete impracticality. Most people put their cows out to open range until late fall when all but a few were killed and salted down for winter beef. They could only afford to feed a couple of cows through the winter.

Delaware dairy cows have come a long way from the large-boned rugged cattle the Swedes brought with them when they started their new lives in America back in 1638. As the different nationalities settled in the New World, each brought their own cattle with them. In addition to the hulking Swedish cows, there were large, yellow-colored Danish cattle and colorful "variegated" Dutch cows.

"When all these breeds began mixing together, you can imagine what a conglomeration we had," says Passmore, who also helps her husband run their dairy farm near Taylor's Bridge.

It wasn't long, however, before people realized the advantages of breeding cattle to perpetuate desirable traits. When the industry arrived at "neat" or blooded cattle in America, according to Passmore, cattle owners began im-

porting animals with certain qualities.

Even before the Civil War, Durham Shorthorn cattle were brought here from

England and another popular breed was the Devon — a strong but rather gaunt, reddish cow. Beginning to differentiate

between meat and milk cows at this time, farmers imported Holsteins and Alderney cattle (Jerseys

and Guernseys) strictly for milking purposes.

"The dairy industry really started when the railroad

came through during the mid-1800's," says Passmore.

"The farmers now had a way

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The dairy cow as we know her today was unheard of less than 100 years ago. Man has made her what she is through specific breeding and feeding programs.

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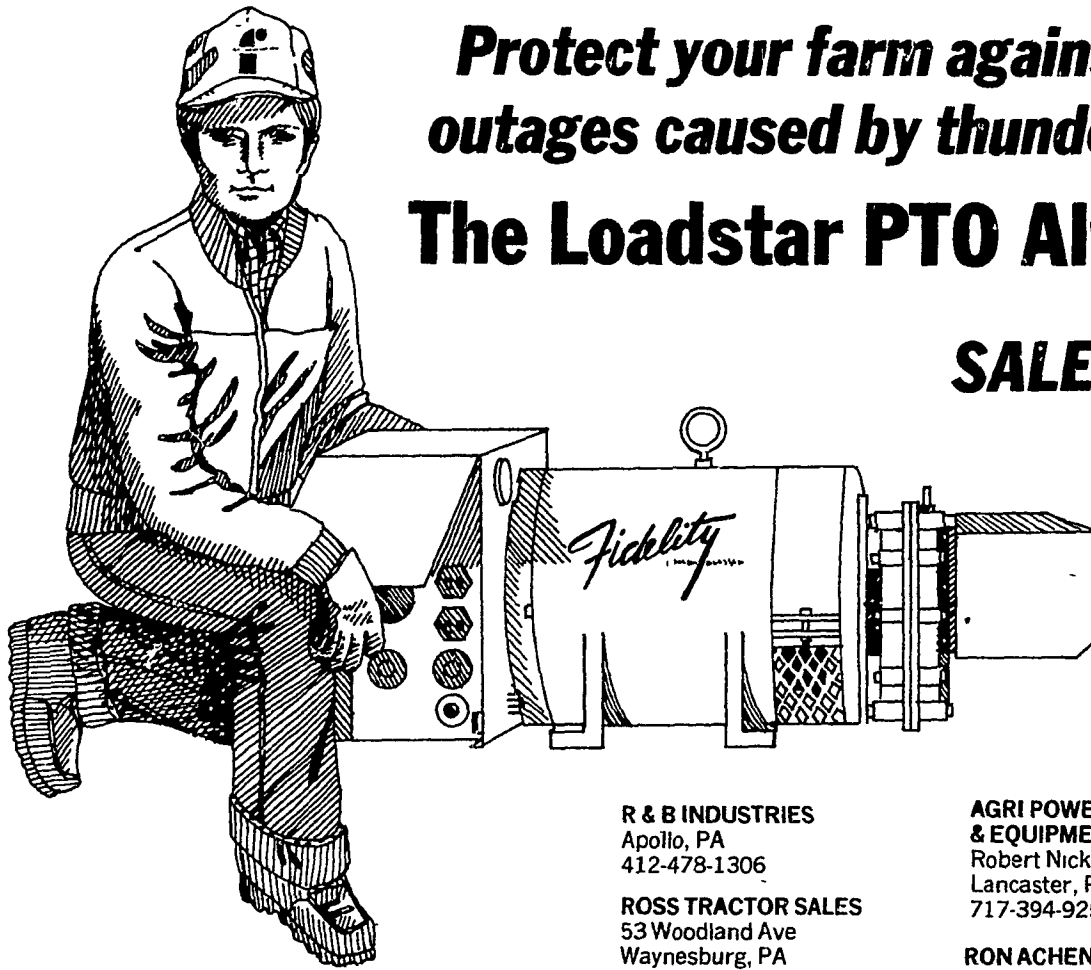
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