

LIFE on the farm

By Dieter Krieg, Editor

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It's 5:30 a.m. — the beginning of another day, even though the night does not appear to have gone.

Silence and a light frost cover the countryside. The stars are sparkling in a cloudless sky, and there's only a faint hint towards the east that a sunrise will occur in another hour.

I walk into the barn, take off my jacket, flick on the lights, and begin the day's activities. The push of a button starts the silo-unloader, which throws down silage for the morning feeding. Most of the cows are lazily beginning to get up as they anticipate their forkful of silage and portion of grain. Some, like Cindy and Bosco, who are forever hungry, voice their anxiety without hesitation.

While the silage accumulates at the base of the silo, just in front of the cows, I take a broom to sweep the feed alley, and then a scraper to clean the litter alley. By the time that's done, there's enough silage down to begin feeding. The whole barn soon smells of corn silage as the material is spread out in front of 40 cows. It's a pleasant odor.

A grain ration is fed according to each individual cow's production level, body condition, closeness to calving, and age. A few, like Cindy and Bosco, get an extra pinch to keep them friendly. The truth is they're both too friendly — they're spoiled and my favorite pets.

Nearly 20 minutes have gone by since I walked into the barn, and another 10 will pass before the milking starts. I have already walked a couple of miles — back and forth, back and forth — in a barn which is 160 feet long. There are plenty more miles to come. This barn is not equipped with pipeline milkers.

Strainers are set on top of the bulk tank, an udder wash is prepared, the milking machines are carried to the far end of the barn, and I'm ready to milk. The noise of the vacuum pump drowns out most of the sounds from the radio, which has been on since I walked into the barn.

The pulsing of pulsators — the "heart" of a milking machine — soon fills the air. The cows are up and

eating, their neck chains occasionally jingle, and periodically there is the hollow sound of two empty buckets being set on the floor after having been emptied in the milk house. Sometimes I get greeted with a nice sloppy tail in the face, which makes me wish I had cleaned the barn before milking. What a way to wake up if a fellow is still sleepy!

The milking procedure goes on for an hour and a half: wash udders, put the milking machine on the cow,

periodically check on the machine's progress to avoid overmilking and resulting udder injury, take the machine off, dump the milk into a carrying pail, and take it to the milk house where it will be cooled and agitated in a bulk tank.

That's how the day starts on a dairy farm — when things go smoothly. As with any business, it's not all bad if things work out right and the income meets expenses.

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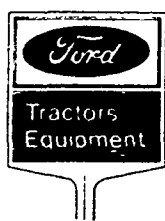
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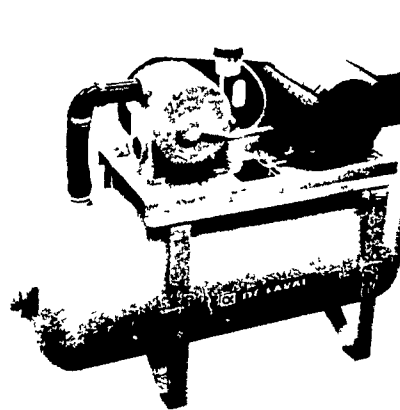


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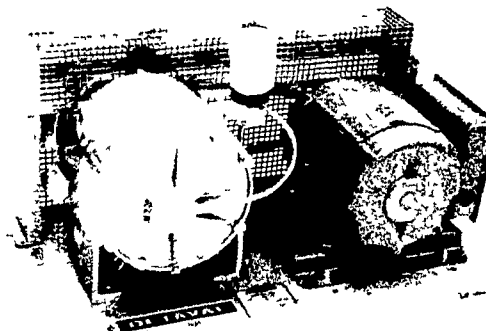
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