

From calves and finance in college to 100 cows, this Adams Countian is making dream come true

By DIETER KRIEG

GETTYSBURG — "We like to keep our operation simple, and our overhead down," is one way E. Lee Ramsburg of southcentral Adams County describes his dairy farm.

It's not a fancy place. The soil has a notorious reputation, most of the buildings are in disrepair, numerous pieces of old equipment are rusting in the field, and the farmstead in general needs a good manicuring.

Ramsburg, a 30-year old dairyman, isn't very concerned about the appearance of his farm, however. He says that he may be farming more than he can effectively handle, but adds that it's a part of a plan which he believes is best until other matters have been established and taken care of.

His primary concern, besides milk production, is having land - enough land - to avoid being hemmed in by developments at some future date.

"When agricultural land comes up for sale nowadays, it may be a farmer's last chance to buy it or else homes will be put on it," he explains. "And how often do you hear a person say: 'I wish I had bought that land back in '64.' Well, I don't want to be faced with the same kind of regrets if I can help it."

Consequently, Ramsburg, who started modestly, considers the acquisition of more land as a key to success. He does not want to be caught in a real estate squeeze. It happened to him once and he doesn't want a repeat experience.

"It's just a matter of what you want to do," he said, explaining that he recently spent \$24,000 for 14 acres in Adams County that's a pretty fair price for land. But not every farmer would have been willing to pay that figure, Ramsburg claims. "And yet they go to the farm machinery shop and don't even get a very big tractor for that kind of money," he reasoned.

Keeping his machinery inventory and costs at a minimum is another key to Ramsburg's farming formula. He bought only the essential items when he first went into the dairy business in 1970 and borrowed whatever else he needed from his father.

Commenting on equipment purchases in general, the young dairy farmer quips: "Fifty per cent of the equipment pur-

chased today really isn't needed. It's bought because a farmer just thinks he wants it - he gets lured in - or he needs a tax break.

As a finance major at the University of Maryland, Ramsburg became familiar with tax structures, and financing. Quick, and even eager to push a pencil, the young dairy farmer calculates carefully before he makes a business decision. And he's not bashful about being shrewd.

When he's dealing with interest-free money at agribusiness establishments, for example, he makes use of the time granted for payment. That allows him more flexibility with his money, he says, adding that he's equally careful about when he places orders, so he can have use of something for the longest possible time before he gets billed for it.

Ramsburg started in the dairy business in a rather unusual way. His father and grandfather were dairymen 30 years ago, but never had any desire to get back into the business after 1950. What's more, there was little encouragement from the elder Ramsburgs no matter how much young Lee pleaded and begged for cows. He notes that his family was known to have one of the better dairy herds in Maryland, with the foundation being of the famous Dunloggn bloodline.

After graduating from high school in 1966, the young man enrolled at the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus, to study finance. Ramsburg explains that he didn't like university life at all and consequently never stayed there any longer than absolutely necessary. To keep himself occupied, he decided to begin raising calves. His father agreed to let him keep them on the family farm (The Ramsburgs lived in Maryland at that time.)

A full-fledged UMBC student, Ramsburg says he was "a country boy in a city school. It wasn't my cup of tea." He commuted back and forth every day to care for his calves. He raised 10 during his freshman year, selling them two years later for a handsome \$4000. Meanwhile, he purchased more young Holstein heifer calves and continued the venture. His costs were negligible since his father provided the feed free of charge in return for the work he was doing around the farm.

Ramsburg kept his calf and heifer business going throughout the time he

studied at UMBC. After his second year at UMBC, however, his studies took him to the main University of Maryland Campus at College Park. That was too far away to commute every day, so the heifers became a Summer-only project.

Ramsburg reminisces that he wasn't sure of what he wanted to do in life until he was in his senior year at the University. He

says he developed an interest in cows when he was just a small boy, but had more or less resigned himself to something else since his parents discouraged him to become a dairy farmer.

Ramsburg's affiliation with dairy students at the University of Maryland strengthened his boyhood ambitions. A former 4-H'er and member of livestock

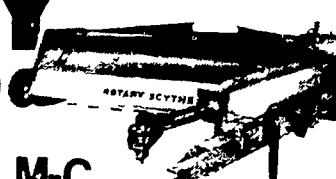
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Lee Ramsburg, his wife, Jane, and their two children, Beau and Kate, have found a happy home on the farm. They live south of Gettysburg and farm over 600 acres.

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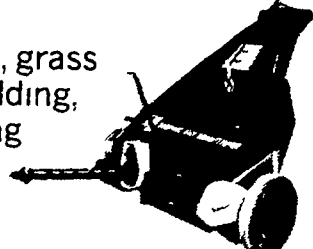
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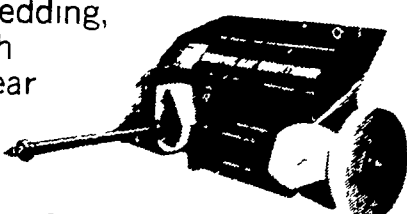
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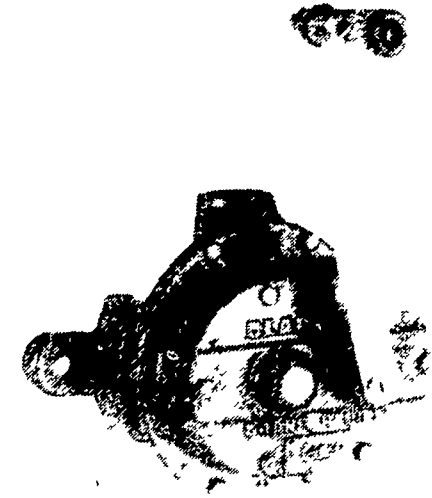
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