

# The farmer's side of 3-sided parlors

**BY CURT HARLER**  
SILVER SPRINGS — If two sides for a milking parlor are good, then three sides would have to be great.

At least, that's the opinion a dairyman might get after a visit to Robert S. Smith's Silver Springs Farm.

Bob Smith farms about 500 acres between Buck and Holtwood with his son Tom and grandson Roger.

Now that they have a bit of experience using the parlor they were able to talk with authority on the pros and cons of using their new setup.

Until late January they were milking about 85 Holsteins in shifts. They were doing the job in 34 comfort stalls.

That required three shifts and it took about two hours time for two men to get the job done.

The Smiths had been milking that way for 10 or 12 years and it seemed about time to change the way things were done.

"We decided to get started this past Spring and the project worked out better than we thought," Bob says.

They used the existing old milkhouse and incorporated it into the new parlor.

By taking the roof off the old milk house they were able to put the entire setup under one roof. The arrangement leaves the ceiling in the milking parlor a bit higher than normal, but has worked well for the Smiths. A few changes, like added length on the grain feeders, were all that was needed.

The parlor consists of 12 milking units. It is divided into three groups of four units each.

As the cows walk into the parlor from the freestall barn they enter at the top point of a triangle. Thus the name of the Clay parlor: Trigon.

Cows can file down either to the left or to the right side of the triangle leading from the entrance door. Or they can go into a separate passage which runs parallel to the left side of the parlor and eventually leads to the milking units at the base of the triangle.

Smiths find the cows actually prefer to go down this passage to the far side of the parlor.

"There are grates the cows see on the two sides of the parlor and they like to avoid them," Bob explains.

Thus there is little problem getting cows well distributed.

Milking is done from a rectangular pit just like those a farmer would expect in a standard double-six.

"We like the stainless steel ramp around the edge of the parlor," Bob is quick to point out.

The edge slopes up and into the pit and provides a bit of protection against a cow's leg sliding into the milking area.

The stalls and grain feeders in the parlor are by Clay. Milkers are Boumatic.

The milking parlor is tied to an old wagon shed which serves as the holding area.

Since it is level with the parlor there was no need to install a ramp.

But the biggest advantage the Smiths first saw to the three sided parlor was it requires less lengthwise space to construct.

They had looked at the double-six but because that type of parlor is long and narrow they would have been required to build the milkhouse out into a drive leading to the freestall area.

Because the Trigon is more compact, that problem was eliminated.

The first few days were difficult.

Like any herd used to being milked in stalls, the Smith cows had trouble getting used to the parlor. But even in the beginning the advantages showed up.

It took two men just 90 minutes to do the milking, a savings of half an hour.

They also found that having three groups of milkers helped move things along better.

"In a double-six a single slow cow holds up a whole side," Bob explains.

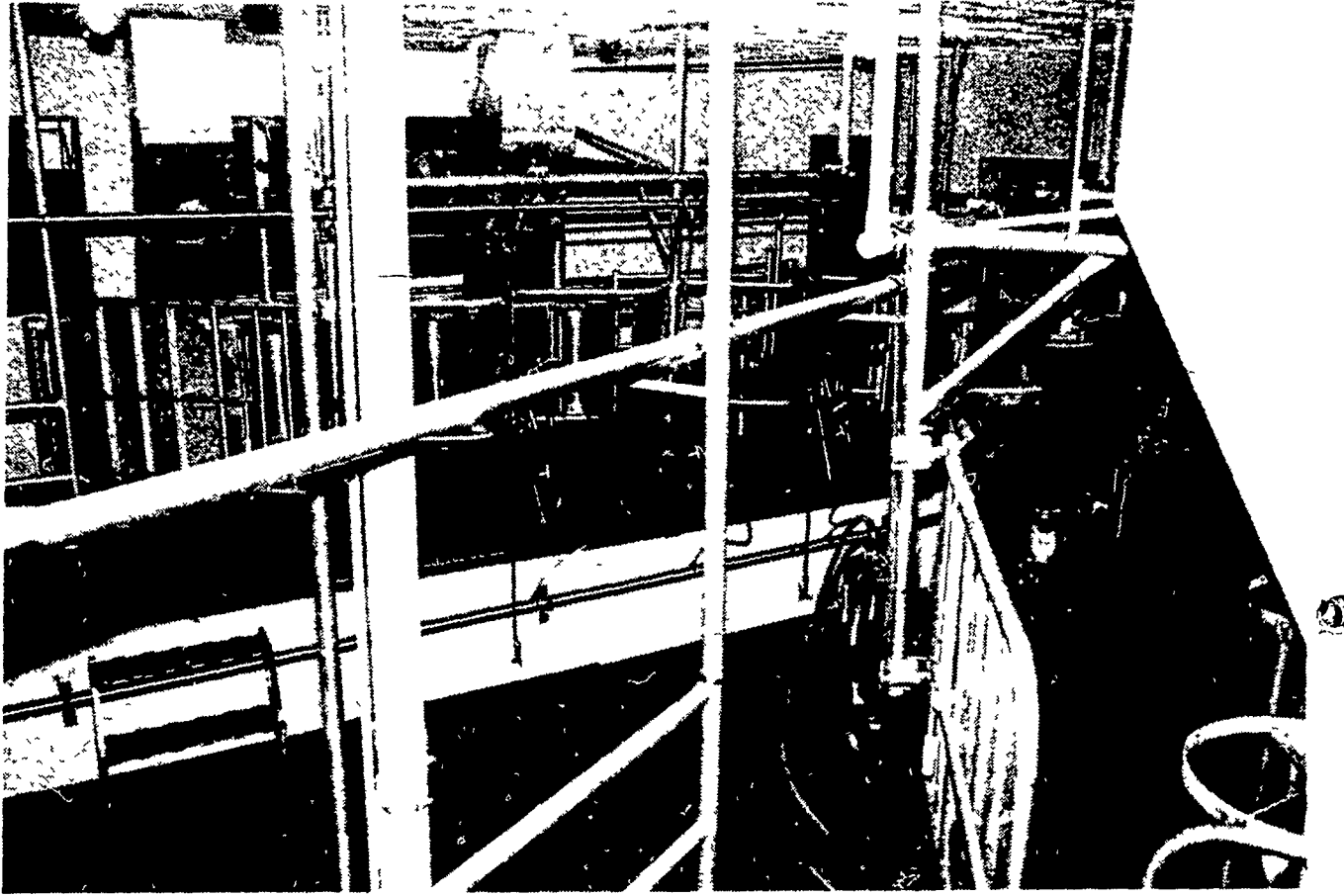
In their setup there are three groups of four so a slow cow is causing delay on only four units rather than six.

The Smiths elected not to use automatic take-offs.

Bob Smith said he expects his problems with getting cows into the parlor will be eliminated once the automatic grain feeders are working.

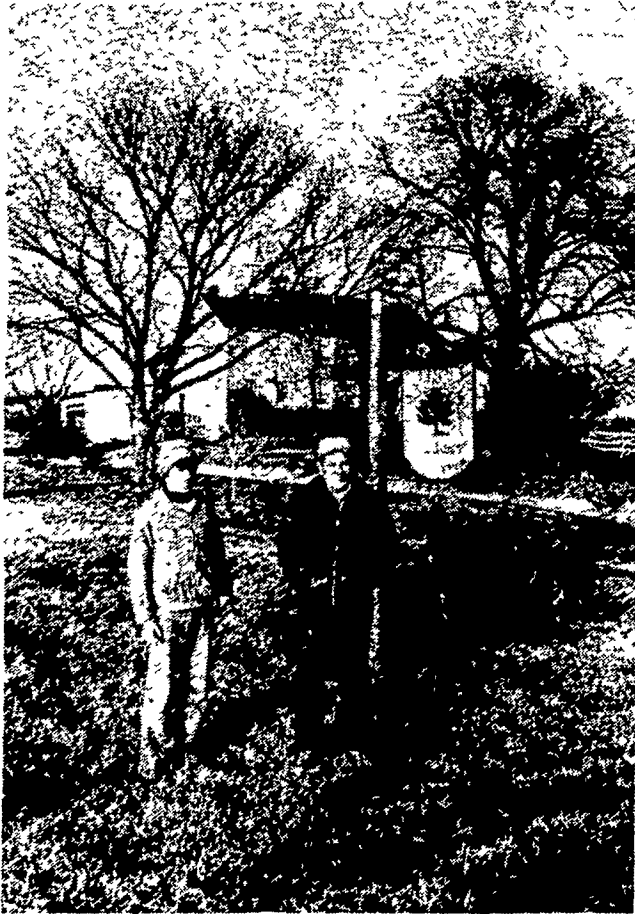
At present they are feeding a complete ration from a mix wagon.

"So, we intend to use just enough grain to lure the cows into the parlor," Bob says, although he adds he may give a bit of extra feed to that high producing cow.



Looking toward the entrance of the Smith's new dairy parlor in background, view shows two of the Trigon's three sides. Third side is behind and to the left. Smiths find cows like to avoid the grates

on the floor by heading around the alleyway in foreground and ending up by the units out of photo. Pit setup for milker is similar to that for other parlors.



Robert S. Smith, right, and grandson Roger pose in front of the Silver Springs Farm sign. Originally a Registered Guernsey operation, they now have a herd of 85 Holstein milkers.

Cows now see only hay in the stall.

Ceiling and walls in the parlor are of glassboard. And it is working fine.

Insulation is a big problem, though, the Smiths discovered. Without sufficient insulation in the ceiling, condensation formed.

"It's come close to raining in here," Bob said, only half joking.

It took most of the summer and fall to get the new parlor built. Milking started in mid-January and the grain feeders are not in yet.

"We were a bit late deciding on them," Bob notes.

But he is pleased with the results of the job.

"Of course, as we use it we find more reasons to like it," he says.

Although dairy is the mainstay at Silver Springs Farm, the Smiths also feed out 150 head of steers.

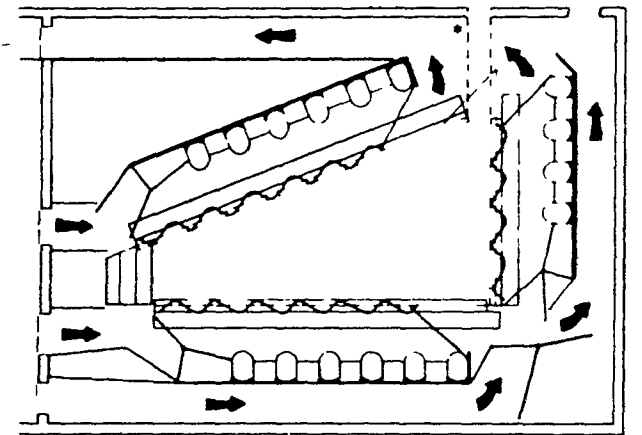


Diagram shows birds-eye view of the Trigon system similar to that at Smiths' farm. Their parlor has four units to a side rather than six pictured. And the Smiths added grain feeders.



Bob Smith hoses down the alleyway in his new parlor. Now that the parlor is in operation he can talk with authority on the little things he appreciates—like the upward slanting rim around the edge of the pit which keeps cows' legs from slipping into the milker's area.

Milk is shipped to Interstate Cooperative

But for the Smiths, the job of getting that milk from the cow to the bulk truck is going to be much easier thanks to their new parlor.

The system is working, the

cows are learning the ropes and the Smiths are saving time.

And those are the three most important sides to the parlor story at Silver Springs Farm.



Tom Smith, Robert's son and partner, loads silage from the trench silo into the mix wagon. Cows will see only enough grain in the parlor to entice them in. The remainder of the feed is total mixed ration.