

Farm expansion brings unique problems

LANDENBERG — Farm expansion always brings its share of problems. It's to be expected.

But Tom and Charles Wilkinson of Wilkinson Farms, Landenberg, Chester County, can do without some of the unique problems they've experienced recently.

In a little more than a half-decade the youthful brothers have turned a four-generation family farm into a vast operation that includes three dairy units, milking herd of more than 400, some 600 head of additional stock and 4,400 acres of owned and rented land.

But back to their problems.

Recently, 16 heifers were found to be missing from pasture.

If that wasn't bad enough, metropolitan newspapers and the Associated Press got a hold of the story and turned it into something that reads like a script from a poor class "B" Western.

An "enterprising" midcity reporter from the Philadelphia Bulletin was particularly melodramatic

in his discription of the situation.

He delighted in using words like rustling, posses, fence riding and cayuse.

"Why, we don't even own a horse," Mrs. Tom Wilkinson said.

Her husband pointed to the gun on the back-window rack of the farm pickup.

"And this is for stray dogs, with which we have been having more of a problem."

But disregarding the journalistic field day the non-farm press has been having, the problem does exist that the Wilkinsons had 16 heifers stolen recently.

The 12 open and four bred Holstein heifers, all identified grade animals, were first noticed missing the week of May 14. They were not reported missing for about a week or 10 days while a search was made.

The open heifers were taken from an 80-acre section of pasture that includes some woodland. The bred heifers were in an adjoining pasture.

A dirt road runs between the two areas and the thieves

may have loaded them into a truck at that point.

The heifers are part of the replacement stock that the Wilkinsons are raising for their continuing herd expansion. They milk at three different farms and total stock numbers about 1,000, including a milking herd of more than 400 and 600 more heifers, calves and bulls which are also being raised.

Of the 4,400 acres in the operation, some 3,000 are tilled. Cropland includes wheat, soybeans, corn and hay.

The wheat and beans are marketed, along with any corn that is not fed. Mulch hay also is harvested and sold to area mushroom growers.

The bulk of the milking herd is kept at the home farm, where two barn units contain 150 free stalls each. The herd is divided by production into the units.

The herd average at Wilkinson Farm Unit 2, the longest on DHIA, now stands at about 16,000 lbs.

The total Wilkinson operation covers quite an area. A younger brother,



This is large rolling pasture from which bred heifers were recently stolen on Wilkinson Farms. Total stock numbers about 1,000, including milking herd, calves, heifers and steers.

Lou, has a custom harvesting operation. Another older brother operates a dairy farm near Gettysburg.

But it troubles the Wilkinsons when they're called ranchers and the operation is called a spread.

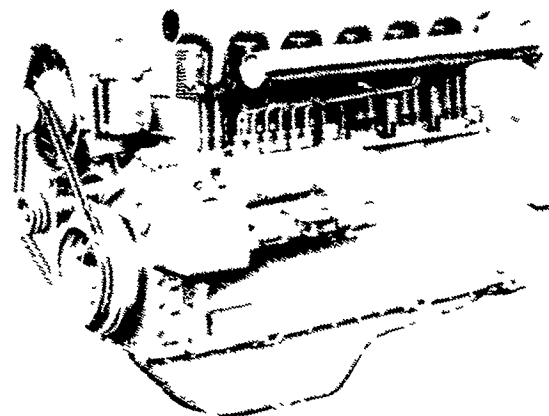
"We're farmers and we work on farms," they emphasize.—DA



Overall view of the Wilkinson home farm, with dry cows seeking out afternoon shade on rolling hillside, includes two barn units with 150 free stalls each at

left and original barn just to the right of central tree. Farm is located a few miles southeast of Avondale, Chester County.

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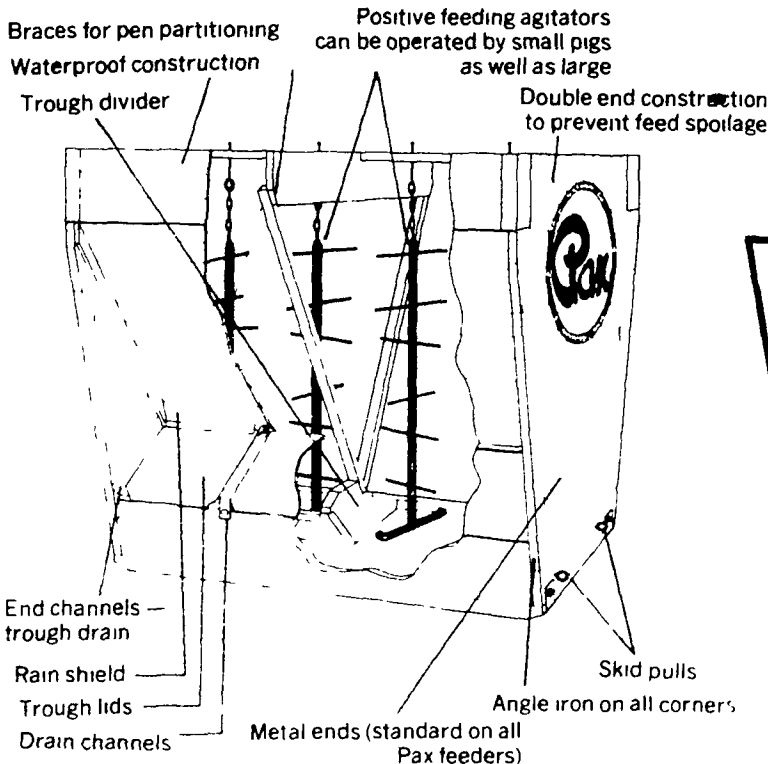
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