

Not everyone rushing to loose housing

BY DON CUNNION

LITITZ — Not all Pennsylvania dairymen rush to put in loose housing the minute their herds approach 100 milkers. Some prefer to stay with tie stalls. Others opt for a combination of the two systems, utilizing what they feel are the best points of each.

Those sticking with tie stalls give several reasons:

- Fewer health problems

because individual animals can be watched more closely.

- Fewer injuries.
- Closer control of feeding for maximum production.
- Animals stay cleaner.

• Better economics. They say it makes more sense these days of rampaging inflation and high interest rates to stick with the setup they've got — even if some improvements have to be made to

handle a few more cows — rather than make the extensive and costly changes necessary for loose housing.

- Personal preference.

At the Castrogiovanni farm, Susquehanna County, John and son, David stick with tie stalls for their 100 milkers because they feel they can more closely regulate feeding and watch individual animal health. It's hard to argue

with the fact that their herd averages better than 19,000 pounds.

Eugene Purdy, another Susquehanna County dairyman, keeps 130 head in stanchions in two barns. He says he stays with the confinement system out of habit and because of the high costs of switching to free stalls. He can see advantages to both systems. If inflation eases off, however, he might consider taking another look at loose housing.

Alpheus Ruth, chairman of the board of Lehigh Co-op, whose Berks County spread now is operated by his son, Joe, and son-in-law, Dave Butler, remains a strong believer in tie stalls.

"In stalls you can give cows more individual attention and more closely monitor their feed," he says.

"Better cows often get lost in a loose housing arrangement."

He believes cows maintain maximum production levels longer in stalls.

Alpheus strongly advocates that dairymen consider getting maximum milk production out of their present size herd before expanding.

"It may sound corny to say it, but I am convinced it is more profitable to get better before getting bigger. Many of the large herds in Berks County have more problems than we do holding to about 80 milkers and tie stalls."

Others agree with Alpheus about holding back on herd size these days. You read recently in Lancaster Farming (January 31 page 2B) how Dick Denison, farm

management services director for PFA, and Glenn Shirk, Lancaster County dairy specialist, have come up with pretty good figures to show that the best way to beat inflation is to increase output per cow.

Burd Schantz, Berks County, milks 150 head and utilizes both tie stalls and loose housing. He says he finds the animals seem happier when he moves them around occasionally from one arrangement to the other.

"Some prefer roaming, others like to stay in the stalls," he said.

"Where I put them largely depends on their individual behavior."

He groups his animals by production levels for feeding purposes. The herd average is about 17,000 pounds.

Bill Fallon, Susquehanna County, splits his herd of over 100 milkers between stalls and loose housing and rotates them for milking in the stalls. But he says he may some day go all the way to loose housing, figuring it will be less work than called for by his present setup.

At Loudon Hill Farm, Susquehanna County, Hank Swartz keeps 250 head in tie stalls, but milks them in a double-three Ross Holm parlor. It takes seven hours to run the herd through the one-man parlor, which operates two shifts a day.

"I feel we have better control over the animals than we would have with loose housing," Hank says.

"We can get more cattle in less floor space and keep injuries to a minimum."

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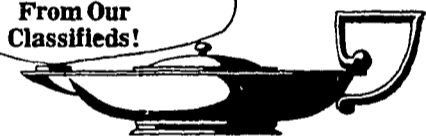
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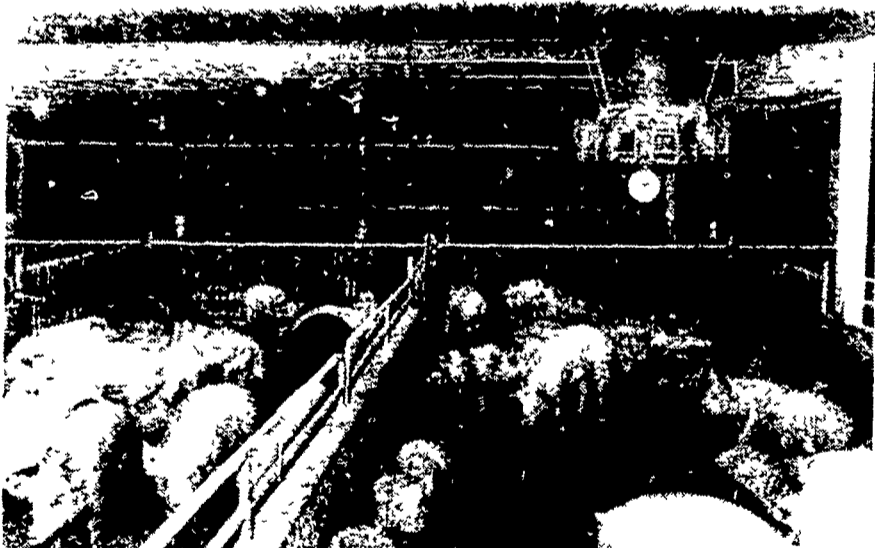
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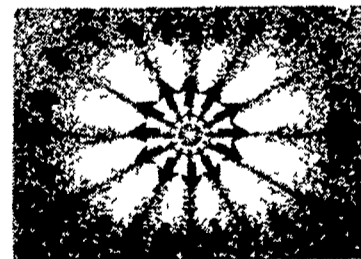
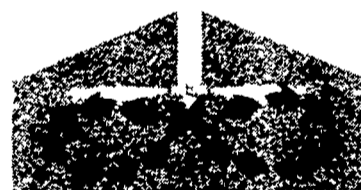
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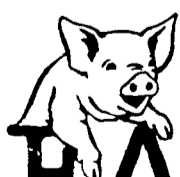
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