

PAFC visits Ricecrest Farm

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

CHAMBERSBURG — The Ricecrest Farms dairy operation near New Franklin is one which from a very small herd to an enterprise which now boasts 150 milking cows and supports two families.

The key to the operation, which is a partnership owned by Fred E. and his brother Dale, is innovative approached and sound management decisions.

J. Fred Rice, the present partners' father bought his own 85-acre farm in 1962, after having rented a farm, worked in partnership with another farmer and worked on other farms. He was raised in towns but was determined to become a farmer.

From 1976-1980 he and Fred had a legal partnership and in 1980 the senior Fred sold his half of the partnership to son Dale. J. Fred raises feeder pigs on the farm and serves as part time help.

For Fred and Dale, cows are the most precious asset of the their operation. Fred points out that in their latest farm analysis, 47 percent of their total net worth is in their cattle and nine percent is in machinery.

When 33 young farm couples visited their farm this week as part of the Pennsylvania Association of Farmer Cooperatives' "Co-op Couples Conference," the brothers pointed to some of their successes in their two-year partnership.

Their June Dairy Herd Improvement average was 17,900 pounds of milk and 662 pounds of fat. The cows are milked in a double-six herringbone milking parlor, using automatic take-off units.

The Rices split their herd into two groups, with the top 104 producers being housed in a new drive-through feeding building with self-locking stalls. A total mixed ration will be fed to the cows there.

Fred explained to the visiting couples that they feel there will be advantages to their new housing arrangement in breeding, vaccination, blood testing and other herd checks necessary to overall good herd management. In the top producing group they are top dressing for cows over 70 pounds.

The "tail-enders," numbering approximately 35-40 cows, are housed in a separate free stall building. Dale explained that these constitute the low 35 cows in production, those at the end of their lactations and others.

There is a dry cow and heifer lot from which the cows are brought in once a day, tied and checked for mastitis. Cows freshen in the pasture which is adjacent to the barns and the house. From December to March, cows freshen in stalls.

Calves are raised in a eight-year-old calf barn, specially ventilated with individual stalls. Mrs. J. Fred Rice is responsible for feeding the calves and the mortality rate is 2 percent.

While the Rices do not believe in investing heavily in equipment, last year they began baling large round bales and have been pleased with the results. Fred says, "You can save the leaves and get better quality hay. We use an applicator and feel it is worth it, but you must know what moisture you're working with." They have found they can bale a lot at night.

About the round bales, Fred notes, "They're tight. You have to

be more careful with round bales." For feeding, they use a bale unroller. Heifers and dry cows feed it as is. Fred says, "They eat the bale."

Owning 120 acres and renting 215 acres, the Rices have 140 acres in alfalfa, 165 in corn, 10 in barley and 80 acres are double-cropped — 36 acres of rye to corn and 44 acres of alfalfa to corn.

They use a combination of silos and trenches about which Fred says, "It's not ideal, but we got caught with it." He added that he personally prefers trenches, but that they take good management. Haylage is stored in the trench, with the upright holding corn silage.

There is a feed center on the farm, where their total mixed ration is combined. They buy supplement in bulk and store their acid-treated corn in open bins in the barn. Fred says, "The acid treatment preserves the shelled corn." They usually like to harvest the corn in November, with the moisture content "the lower the better" but usually in the low twenties. The system works out well for their custom operator because they can use him two weeks later than most others.

Before going into the partnership with his father, Fred worked for the USDA in Baltimore, returning



Fred Rice discusses his farming operation with young cooperative couples who visited Ricecrest farm as part of a two-day conference in Chambersburg sponsored by the Pennsylvania Association of Farmer Cooperatives.

to work on his father's farm which then had 25 cows in the herd. After marrying in 1971, Fred rented an adjacent 130-acre farm, and bought about 6-8 cows annually to build up the herd. He and his wife have two children Allen, 5, and Darren, 20.

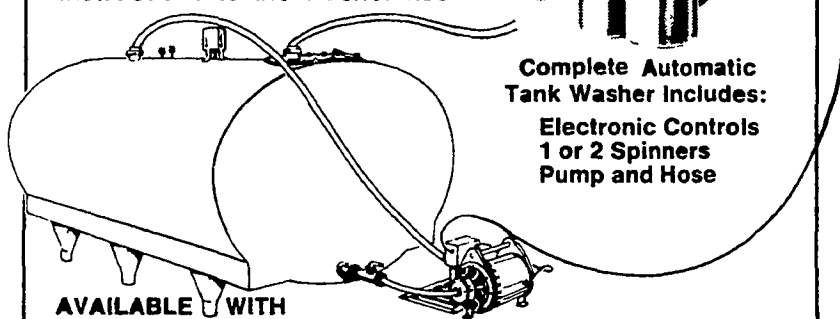
Dale graduated in 1979 from Penn State with a B.S. in Animal Science, and formed the partnership with Fred after working for one year with his brother and father. He is now herdsman for Ricecrest Farms.

The PAFC-sponsored tour learned that Ricecrest markets their milk through Lehigh, and purchases many of their supplies from Agway, of which Fred is a committeeman. He serves on the resource promotion committee for Atlantic Breeders Cooperative. Sire Power is also used in their breeding program.

For Ricecrest, astute management and a genuine concern for the well-being of their cows has build their operation into an efficient dairy herd.

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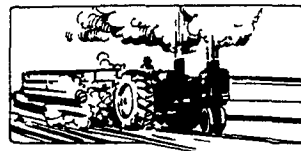
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