

## Rutts fight inflation with finger-tip feeding

BY DONNA TOMELLEO

PEACH BOTTOM — Efficiency, according to a dictionary, is performing in the best possible or least wasteful manner. Webster described it. Jeff Rutt, a Peach Bottom dairyman practices it, everyday.

About four years ago, the young dairyman purchased his 200-acre farm from his father Ken and has since revamped the management program which includes the latest addition of a sophisticated computer feeding system.

"I've always been interested in feeding cows to make them more efficient," Rutt explained. And with space-age technology, the dairyman can adjust a cow's daily intake with the touch of a button.

The two feeders, located in the free-stall, have eliminated feeding in the barn during milking, said Rutt. But perhaps more importantly the FarmTronix system has eliminated waste.

Shortly after he purchased the farm, Rutt bought a mixer wagon so that he could offer his herd a complete mixed ration. His feeding program consisted of two bunks, one for the higher producing early lactation cows and one for the tailenders. Both bunks contained a total mixed ration of corn silage, haylage, high moisture corn. However, the rations differed in that the high producers were offered a diet with a greater concentrate to forage ratio.

In addition, the rations, fed during milking were top-dressed with a 24 percent protein supplement. But he could see shortcomings with just the two bunk system.

"Some cows were getting too much from the bunk and the high producers couldn't get enough and couldn't eat fast enough during milking," he noted.

The two bunks still remain, the high producers on one side, the late



In just a few seconds, Jeff Rutt can change a cow's daily intake, ask for a complete report, find out what cow is feeding at that very moment and determine what cow or cows may

be off feed. The Peach Bottom dairyman estimates that the computer will save him about \$13,500 a year in feed costs.

lactation group on the other. But of the 95-cow herd, 60 milkers now wear yellow tags or transponders which automatically cue the metal feeders to throw down the exact amount of feed that Rutt has programmed.

The feeders contain an 18 percent cracked corn concentrate. A high producer, making 100 pounds of milk a day, is treated to about 25 pounds of the concentrate a day. Throughout her lactation, the amount is adjusted. When decreasing a cow's ration, Rutt gradually lowers the level she's permitted to eat.

With the use of DHIA sheets, Rutt can determine lactation peaks and cuts. For example, if a cow needs a four pound concentrate decrease, Rutt will program the computer to decrease a pound every other day as opposed to an all-at-once slash.

Pushing a pencil, Rutt estimated the system will save him approximately \$13,500 in feed costs a year. Further calculations showed the computer will pay for itself in about 9 months.

And the system has other advantages that won't show up on paper. Every 24 hours, the small computer kicks out a status report. Eyeballing the report, Rutt can determine cows that may be off feed which could be an indication of a health problem.

Rutt can also ask the computer

for an on-the-spot report. A few button-punching seconds later, and the computer "tattles" on what cow is at the feeders at that very moment, how much she has eaten so far and how much she's allowed all day.

At Rutt's grade-Holstein dairy, the computer goes to work at 7 p.m. everyday. That begins the reporting period. If a cow is allowed to eat 20 pounds a day and by 4 p.m. she's consumed all 20, she has to wait three more hours before the new day begins.

The computer also has a check and balance system. If something is amiss, the warning letters, S-O, appear on the screen. In their four months as computer owners, the Rutts have yet to see an S-O.

But what the Peach Bottom dairyman said he's noticed since installing the computer is that high producers are peaking at higher levels and holding longer. The Rutts have been on Owner-Sampler milk testing since October 1981, so it will be a few

months before the herd establishes a rolling herd average.

Although pleased with his computerized management tool, Rutt explained that like any management tool, one has to make it work.

"You can't just go buy a computer and expect things to happen," he said.

And making things happen, is what interests this efficiency-minded dairyman.

Soon after buying his father's farm, Rutt revamped the 30-stall barn. He converted 15 stalls into a type of parlor. Seven individual spigots stand between every other stall. The Rutts run 15 units, each with an automatic takeoff. The harvested milk travels to the adjacent milkhouse via a stainless steel pipeline. The remaining 15 stalls are used for treatment and breeding.

To further save on the high cost of dairy farming, Rutt's haylage

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When the transponder touches the white plate beneath the automatic feeder, a measure of feed is instantly dropped before her. If a cow has finished her daily allotment before a new feeding period begins she is treated to an empty bin.



Jeff and Suzanne Rutt take a moment from their busy schedule to relax with a couple of four-legged friends. The calf is a daughter of Kingway Elevation Very, a bull that figures

heavily into the Rutt's breeding program and the rather large Saint Barnard answers to "Trooper."



Sporting the latest in feeding transponders—the number 10 tag—around her neck, this big Black and White has a daily allotment of 18 pounds of feed from the computerized system.