

Solar fencers shine as isolated pasture chargers

BY GINGER SECRIST MYERS
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GETTYSBURG — Do you have animals on pastureland that is isolated from buildings, or on rented property that is out of your daily view? Are you tired of the expense, time, and labor of checking and changing power cells in battery-powered fencers? Are you trying to save on your electric bills? If so, perhaps you should follow Adams County cattleman John Bigham's lead and install a solar-powered fencer to solve these problems.

John, his father James W., and his brother James R., from 450 acres just down the road from the Eisenhower Farm near Gettysburg. They have a variety of livestock which includes a 120-head, cow-calf operation. With the labor involved in farming and their proximity to the tourist trade from Gettysburg, the Bighams find that reliable fencing is a must for their operation.

John Bigham saw a solar fencer last winter at his local Agway dealership and decided to give one a try on his hillside pastures. John is using the fencer, which installs like any other fencer, to run a double strand of wire 1/8-mile. The unit can run up to 25 miles of fence compared to other units which usually run up to 10 miles of fence, he said.

The 6 volt unit, which carries an Underwriter's Laboratory approved label, can run up to 21 days without sunlight on stored solar power. It features a normal or miser power control and has a normal or dry weather condition grounding option. The battery is sealed inside the unit and comes in a dated package. If the package date is over two months old, the unit should be left in the sun or exposed to house lights for three to five days for battery recharge.

Bigham projects that with proper care of the unit, which cost him \$139.95, he expects it to run five years. He says he plans to take the unit indoors this winter.

Bigham says the initial cost of his fencer, is a bargain compared to the \$120 it cost to replace batteries annually in cell-powered fencers.

"I can't see a more economical way to put up a fence," Bigham exclaims. "This unit didn't cost me as much as one roll of woven wire fence and I can rest assured that as long as the sun shines sometime, my fencer is working. With battery powered fencers you can't always be sure."

With his solar unit, Bigham



John Bigham, Gettysburg, inspects his solar-powered fencer. Bigham says the unit saves him labor and material costs in fencing his cows and calves.

constructed the fence using 1/4-mile of wire, post and insulators that he had on the farm. He inserted springs periodically to give the fence some stretch in case deer run into it. Altogether it took him 7 hours to put the fence up for a total investment of \$172.

The cattle confined by the solar powered fencer are about four-tenths of a mile from Bigham's main buildings. "If I were to run a wire from the barns out to here, it wouldn't have enough power in it to be effective. I'd have to keep the weeds off of it too. With the solar unit, I can put it where I want it and it gets the job done. You just can't get any more effective fencing than this for the money," claims Bigham.

The Bighams are planning to put a solar fencer on another farm where they currently have electric fencers. John estimates they will save \$20 on their electric bills by replacing these fencers with solar units.

John says he hopes solar waterers will be next so that watering distant pastures becomes more economical.

Fred Kelly, department manager for Agway's Gettysburg store, says the solar unit's current selling price is \$159.95 each. Kelly admits sales have been slow so far, but feels confident that, as fencers are replaced, farmers will consider the solar units.

"These units may be more expensive to start with, but they should be maintenance free. Their

best feature is that they can be used on isolated pasture," Kelly says.

Farm Supply Supervisor Johnny Robertson of Southern States Inc., Taneytown, Maryland, has his doubts about the popularity of the units. Southern States carries a similar model which sells for \$166.70.

Robertson points out that in thirty-three stores last year, only four solar units were sold compared to 275 regular fencers. Stated Robertson, "Solar fencers have an advantage in that you don't have to change the batteries. But, if you have the use of buildings, I don't think farmers will pay the difference in price for the units." Robertson quotes the average cost for a conventional fencer at \$55-\$65.



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