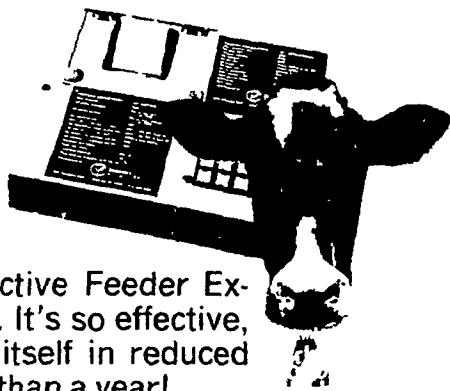


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- Program Each Cow to receive the amounts of feed as compared to production
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The Dairy Business By Newton Bair

Now, About Those Computers:
Lately there has been an almost constant stream of articles, information and propaganda about the use of computers in agriculture. They almost make one feel guilty if you are not one of the 'early adopters' of the computer as a farm tool. Well, I have no intention of making anyone feel guilty of inferior. But to keep the record up to date, let's look at what is happening.

Just like the telephone of eighty years ago, or the Fordson tractor sixty or more years back, most farmers want to wait until there is plenty of evidence that they really need one. Or that this new tool will do something better, faster, or more thoroughly than the old way.

The computer won't ever replace good judgement or even good common sense. But we have to look at some of the things it can do that would be very difficult or nearly impossible any other way. And since there are plenty of dairymen and other farmers who have already begun to use them, we can get a good idea of how and why they are using computers.

First, we should distinguish between the home or small business type, which is properly called a 'mini computer', and the type that is used for special applications like cattle feeders, special controls and automatic recording devices. Applications hardware is usually designed for a single purpose only, like the automatic cattle feeders that ration and record the feed eaten by each cow. On the other hand, minicomputers such as the Apple II, Radio Shack, Comodore etc., are much more versatile and intelligent. They quickly become indispensable for record keeping,

decision making and a multitude of other uses, limited only by the users initiative and imagination.

Application Hardware
So far, more farmers have latched on to the idea that a computer should automate some part of the business. Cattle feeding systems are becoming very popular for this reason. I know of at least a dozen already on line in Lebanon County, and I'm sure there are many in the surrounding area. The cost of this type of equipment is fairly high, running from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per farm. The economics of an expenditure like this must be very carefully analyzed, not only from the dollars and cents angle, but also from the effect on time, herd health, family involvement and overall management.

When we examine the reasons for installing a computerized feeding system, some are valid and some are not. Large herds are harder to group and often place individual cows under a lot of stress when moved between groups. Individual attention is pretty difficult to manage. A computerized feeding system might possibly be the answer to this if there are limitations on the herd management. The limits might be the time, energy or management ability of the owner or herdsman. In this case, automation is substituted for human judgement. However, the computer will only perform or pay off in proportion to the good judgement of the herdsman. I heard of one fellow who had the system removed because it didn't save time, and the dealer couldn't 'work out the bugs'.

A computerized feed system sets
(Turn to Page D20)

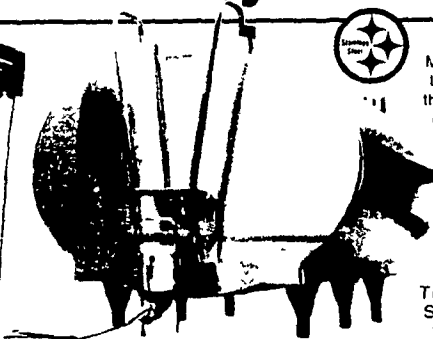
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