

Water - the final dairy management variable?

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

MYERSTOWN — Your dairy herd is just not producing up to its fullest potential, but you can't put your finger on the exact cause.

Barn and parlor facilities have been updated to improve comfort and sanitation.

Good bulls are being used in the breeding program and the pedigree of the string of foundation brood cows indicates more milk should be flowing into the tank.

The feeding ration has been fine-tuned and includes a special package of vitamin supplements.

But still your rolling herd average hovers around a certain level, fluctuating up and down slightly, but never really climbing to where you think it should go. And, besides you're experiencing some nagging occasional unexplained health problems, particularly in young stock.

More and more area dairy farmers who find themselves in this situation are beginning to take a close look at their water as what may be the final management variable in their attempts to eke out the most production efficiency during these difficult economic times.

At the forefront of those helping dairy farmers take a closer look at their water is Dennis Martin, of Martin's Water Conditioning Systems, Myerstown.

"We've been in the water treatment business for 11 years and beginning about six years ago started keying on farm water supplies, particularly dairy operations," Martin explains.

"We take a close look at the dairy water and particularly those elements in it that could affect herd health and production levels.

"After testing the water, we assemble a conditioning system that is sized for all of the water that is used — not only for the milking herd, but the dry cows, heifers and calves, too."

The four main elements that are tested are the levels of nitrates, sulfates, bacteria and pH of the water.

"Our system is designed to not just reduce the level of these harmful elements, but almost wipe them out entirely," Martin said.

To date, Martin has worked with more than 50 herds, ranging from 40 to 200 cows, located primarily in Lebanon, Dauphin, Lancaster and Berks counties. But as word of the water conditioning has spread so has the geographical distribution of the on-farm programs.

Martin attributes the growing interest in water purity to two factors. First, dairymen are examining every management variable that can affect production. Second, testing has shown that water supplies are becoming worse every year.

For each of the four main possible harmful elements, close attention is paid to nitrate levels over 10 milligrams per liter, sulfates over 50 milligrams per liter, bacteria levels at any significant level and pH in excess of 7.5.

One example of a dairy operation that has installed a complete conditioning system is Ken-Nel Farms, of Ken and Nelson Stoner, Lexington. The system was installed in February, 1983.

"Testing the water showed levels of 22 milligrams per liter for nitrates and about 100 for sulfates," Ken Stoner said.

In addition to treating for these two elements, the system has an ultra-violet unit for bacteria and a unit to bring the pH back up to recommended levels following treatment.

"Before the system, the cows just weren't eating what was recommended for them," Nelson Stoner said. "I'd say they were eating about 80 percent of what



Dennis Martin displays some of the water conditioning units he's installing on dairy farms.

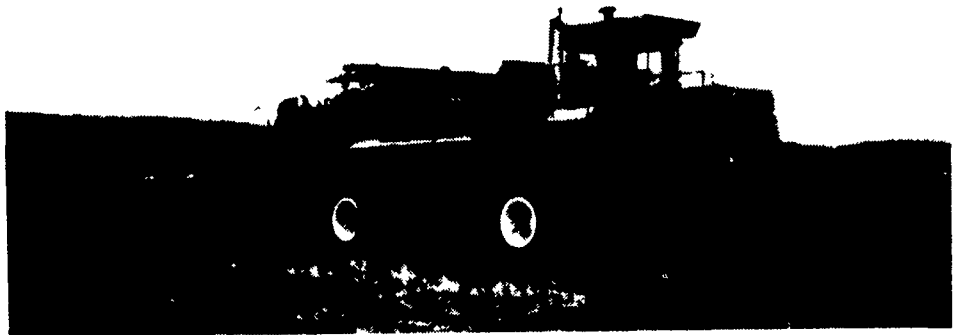
Water conditioning system serves entire farm of Ken and Nelson Stoner, including milking herd, replacements and dry cows.

OPEN HOUSE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9th

10:00 AM - NOON

The Philadelphia Water Department Invites You To See Their Program In Action At The J. Wood Farm, Lee's Bridge Road, Little Britain Twp. (Lanc. Co.)



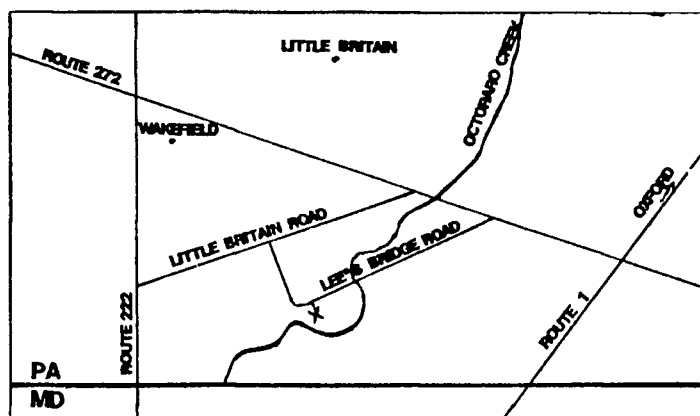
MACHINE DEMONSTRATIONS

COFFEE & DONUTS

P.W.D. & AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE ON HAND TO TALK ABOUT:

- 1) The Use Of Sewage Sludge In Farming
- 2) PA DER & The Permit Process
- 3) The Value of Philadelphia Water Dept. Products To You

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