

Farming with river at door



High water marks painted on the farm store pay silent testimony to the Susquehanna River's continuing inundation of Youngway's rick bottom ground, barns and farm homes.

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Under torrests of rain pouring from leaden skies, the Youngs moved the milking animals to the second floor of a barn next to Ned and Molly's house, the same place that had offered refuge to the family so many times before.

"We never had water in that second floor of the barn up there," Young relates. There, we were sure they'd be safe."

That was Wednesday. Waters continued to rise, rapidly filling the barns, the dairy store, the first floor of the house. Youngs watched from their refuge on the home's second floor.

Still it continued, the river rising by feet as the rain fell by inches.

Escape by boat

Through the dangerous rushing waters on Thursday came local fireman, who loaded the family into boats and took them to safety with Ned's brother's family.

When the river finally crested late that week, it had hit the 36-foot level.

By early Saturday, the waters had dropped enough to allow the men some measure of safety in returning to the battered farmstead, a scene of almost unbelievable destruction and chaos.

Immediate attention went to the milking herd, which had stood in up to 34 inches of water during those long, terrifying days and nights.

Working their way through the shambles, the Youngs found some cows struggling in hay holes, where pressure of the rising waters had pushed up safety doors. With sheer force of back labor and

with its motors and button operating panels had taken many feet of water, and took days before it could be dried out, repaired and put back into usable shape.

Second cutting of hay, laying in windrows, had simply floated away downstream.

July 4 came and went before the fields became dry enough to venture on with the lightest equipment. Then, before a tractor could make a single pass through a field, every foot had to be policed for litter.

Bottles, cans, tires, garbage debris of every kind imaginable, even a tanker truck from a parking lot upstream, remained in the muddied, sticky, smelly mess.

adrenalin, they hauled the disabled animals back up out of the square traps. Some were saved. For others, it was too late. Several had to be destroyed because of extensive injuries, and about a dozen total fell victims to the flood's fury.

Hand milking

Although many cows had already naturally begun drying up production after three days of no feed and no milkouts, hand milking took hours. Miraculously, the electricity was operational; and later that same day a portable milker was located, easing the tedious job of working in the muddy, sloppy, crowded conditions at least a bit.

Every tractor in spite of having been moved to higher ground, had been under water. Every motor at the barn, feed room, processing plant was soaked and coated with slimy ooze. The shop tools, moved to supposed-safety on the barn's upper floor, lay wet, mud covered and inoperable.

"Everything was just soaked, ruined. The store looked like it had been bulldozed," Young continues.

First major cleanup focus was in the milking parlor, where vacuum pumps and compressors required tearing down, dryout and some replacement of parts. It was a full week after the cattle had been evacuated before milking resumed with anything that even faintly resembled "normal" working conditions.

Hay floats away

Corn silos were empty, and although the Harvestores had only small amounts of first-cutting in them, the water did not destroy that feed. However, the feed room,

A full three-weeks-worth of work was necessary to clean up, dry out, replace parts and disinfect the store before the doors could be reopened to loyal, local customers.

Although the physical devastation could be repaired over the ensuing weeks, the cash-flow nightmare was just beginning.

There simply were no feed supplies. Corn, replanted, never matured. Hay, both for dry feed and for reconstituting into haylage, was hauled in by the trailer loads.

"And this was before anyone had ever heard much about flood insurance," adds Young.

Herd average drops

Herd average dropped about four thousand pounds, from 15,000 to about 11,000. Many additional cows from the herd had to be

disposed of later, as they developed serious udder or other physical problems.

While government disaster low-interest loans did eventually become available, the financial tangle was still not totally unraveled when the heavens opened again.

"That was September of 1975, and we still hadn't recovered from the Agnes flood. But - this time we weren't getting caught again," vehemently relates Young. "Those memories were just still too vivid. We moved everything - including ourselves."

Cattle all went to empty barns, the milkers several miles away. When the river crested at 29 feet, it left the standing corn crop leaning downstream, but relatively un-

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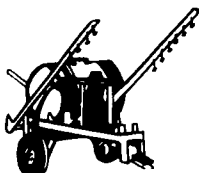
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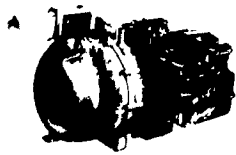
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