

# Dairy diversion relieved the pressure to produce

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS

Staff Correspondent

TAMAQUA — "I'm well satisfied," Bruce Leatherman, R1, Tamaqua, says about the milk diversion program. With the 15-month program drawing to a close this week, Leatherman states, "It afforded us a mental and physical break."

Leatherman and his family farm 500 acres and milk 50 to 80 registered and grade Holsteins with a few Jerseys scattered in the Schuylkill County herd. Cooperating with many government programs throughout his 17-year farming career, Leatherman chose to enroll in the dairy diversion program for a 27% reduction in his milk production.

"Being on the program afforded us the chance to get away more often as a family," he comments. He also adds, "Not everything can be measured in dollars and cents," referring to the relief from the pressure to continually produce more milk.

The Leatherman's--Bruce, Helen, and their three sons, Neal, age 15, Brent, age 12, and Timmy, age seven--provide most of the labor in their extensive farming operation. With only seasonal help hired as needed, Leatherman utilizes six stave silos in his silage based feeding program for his dairy herd.

Grain bins and dryers also enable him to cash crop some of his acreage. In normal years,

income is split half and half between the dairy operation and the crops.

"With the extreme workload that we have," Leatherman continues, "we were under a lot of pressure." Enrollment in the milk diversion program was "just not as much worry," according to this dairyman.

"I don't want to offend anybody. I respect their opinions," Leatherman states about many farmers who resented the program, the intervention of the government, and the funding by the dairymen themselves. "We've cooperated with government programs," he states. Concerning the dairy diversion program, he adds, "We decided right from the start that we were going to abide by the rules."

"We were concerned about signing up because we merchandise breeding stock," Leatherman continues. He believes in purchasing good stock when it is available at a low price. This enables him to breed better bloodlines into his home stock, cull poor producers, and merchandise good, sound young animals.

"We realized that we would miss some sales," he admits. But he adds that while they were on the program, they were able to sell several animals to other producers on the program and were also fortunate enough to export several cows overseas. Getting many contacts through their local ASCS



The Leatherman family enjoyed the relaxed pace and chance to take time off together while they were on the dairy diversion program.

office, Leatherman adds, "They (ASCs) were very cooperative."

"One advantage we had was that we didn't have a base," Leatherman continues concerning their dairy. Not shipping to an Order 4 dairy, they did not have to worry about having a low base after the program ended. Leatherman ships to Guers Dairy, Tamaqua, a small, local plant. "We were concerned about our local dairy," he relates. "We planned to keep our production higher in the fall for the sake of the dairy."

"First thing we did on the program was to quit breeding heifers," Leatherman relates. Heifers were bred later to freshen after March. Leatherman also turned to poorer quality forages to feed the milking herd and saved his best forages for after the program ended. "We tried for higher butterfat and less production," he adds.

The most satisfying aspect about being on the program, according to Leatherman, was the culling. Starting out with 80 milking animals, he cut back to 55 in the milking string by culling at least one a week. "I was able to cull like I always wanted to," he states. "We didn't really cull cows that we did not want to, just a lot sooner."

"We also gave almost all our cows an extra month of dry period," he continues about his diversion practices. "We tried to avoid the 'fat cow syndrome,'" he adds and says that health problems did not increase, with vet bills going down. Although his overhead remained the same, "Our expenses were reduced considerably," Leatherman comments.

Raising the butterfat and  
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Leatherman is proud of several young cows in his herd. Here he stands with a beautiful Fond Matt daughter whose dam was an EX-91 Arlinda Chief. Leatherman is also optimistic about his Triple Threat daughter of his high-producing "Spirit" cow.



Neal takes care of preparing the milkers to milk in the pipeline set-up.



The Cabin-Run Farm of the Leathermans is family operated and family enjoyed.



The cows enjoy year-round housing in the large stanchion barn. No pasture is used.