

Individual cow care improves

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

YORK — Although Robert and Rodney Smysers joke about it, wheelbarrows are again in vogue as part of the barn cleaning equipment at their Richlawn Farms, East Berlin Road.

For many years, the hand-pushed manure conveyances had fallen from favor in their 66-tie-stall barn, replaced by gutter cleaners and a pioneering manure pumping and handling system. But a more recent addition to the operation has brought the wheelbarrow back into the picture.

Dry cow handling has been a concern of the Smysers brothers for some time. In the past, they would either hold dry cows in the tie stalls, with the milking herd, or run them into a lot on an adjoining farm. Neither solution, though, was really satisfactory.

"We had too many fat cows; it was a feeding problem," Robert relates. "And we couldn't follow-

up, dry treat cows, as well when they were over on the other farm in the pasture. Since we had no box stalls, too many time calves were born in the gutter."

An attractive, airy, dry cow and maternity barn added two years ago is helping solve these problems. Relying heavily on Penn State engineering suggestions, the Smysers took a basic Agway metal pole barn and modified it to meet their specifications. The 36 x 72 barn, with treated wood around the inside of the bottom walls, has eight 12 x 12 individual-care box stalls, and a loafing area for the dry group.

The dry cow facility connects to the far end of the tie-stall barn, via a cemented, enclosed ramp. As cows complete their lactations, they're dry-treated, moved from the milking barn to one of the individual pens, and follow-up dipped every day for a week. Any cows with mastitis problems during that lactation are again

milked out at the end of a week, and dry treated again. They then join the group of dry cows in the lofting area at the opposite end of the new facility from the box stalls.

"It's really helped," affirms Robert of their dry-cow care. "There's not nearly as much mastitis."

Box stalls are cleaned of manure and any wet bedding every day, with the wastes simply moved down the ramp and into the milking barn gutters--by wheelbarrow.

"It's not a labor-saving barn," they admit. "But we wouldn't do without it."

Straw is chopped and added to box stalls twice weekly, with

bagged shavings put down in between as needed. No bedding pack ever builds up, and occasionally a pen is left stand empty for a period, and limed down as a disinfecting measure.

"Fat cow" syndrome is mostly a problem of the past, since hand feeding in the box stalls allows individual attention. Timothy hay goes to the dry group, along with a little silage, which is fed in heavier volumes to the close springers.

One modification Smysers made are doors which access four of the stalls, on the barn's south side, to outside lots. Purpose of the 20 x 60 lots, one lot per two individual pens, is to get the animals out on fresh grass as much as possible,

along with the added bonus of exercise.

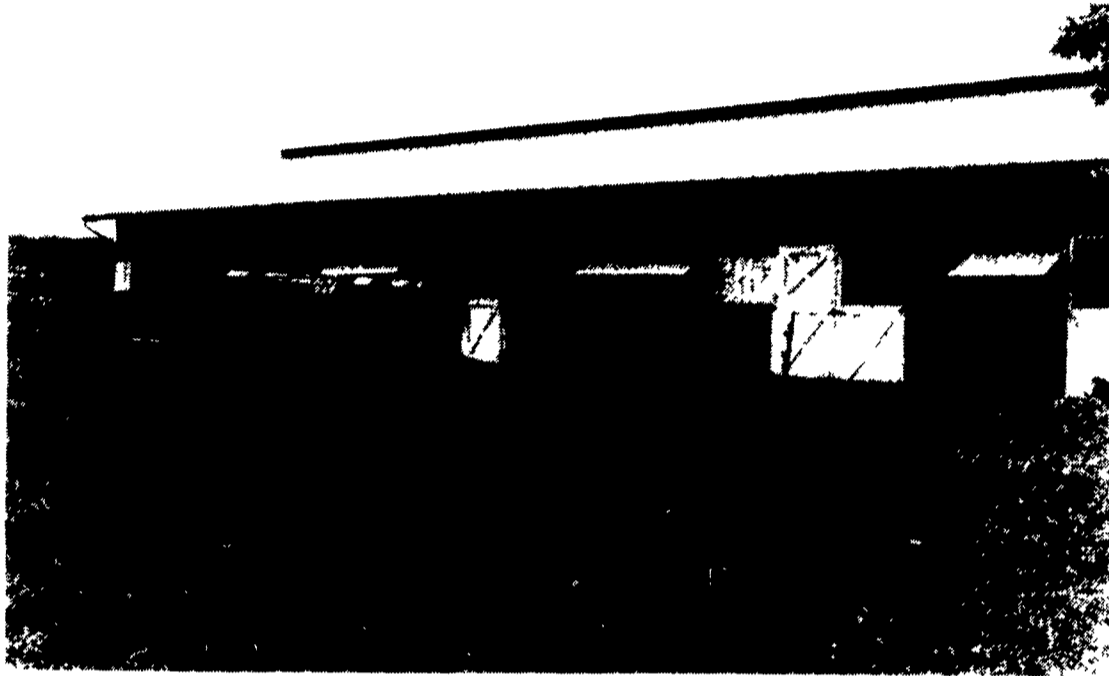
"If we had to do it over, we'd probably make outside access to lots for all the pens, even those on the north side," figures Robert.

Ventilation is all natural, with side, flip-up windows kept open whenever weather permits. A relatively low roof keeps breezes coming through the open ends down near the cows. While no fan installations were planned, portables could easily be set up if an individual cow's pen warranted them.

Individual cow care, geared toward high production, has long been standard at Richlawn, with a rolling herd average on 75 head of



Box stalls in the dry cow area are 12 x 12 and lined along the wall with treated lumber.

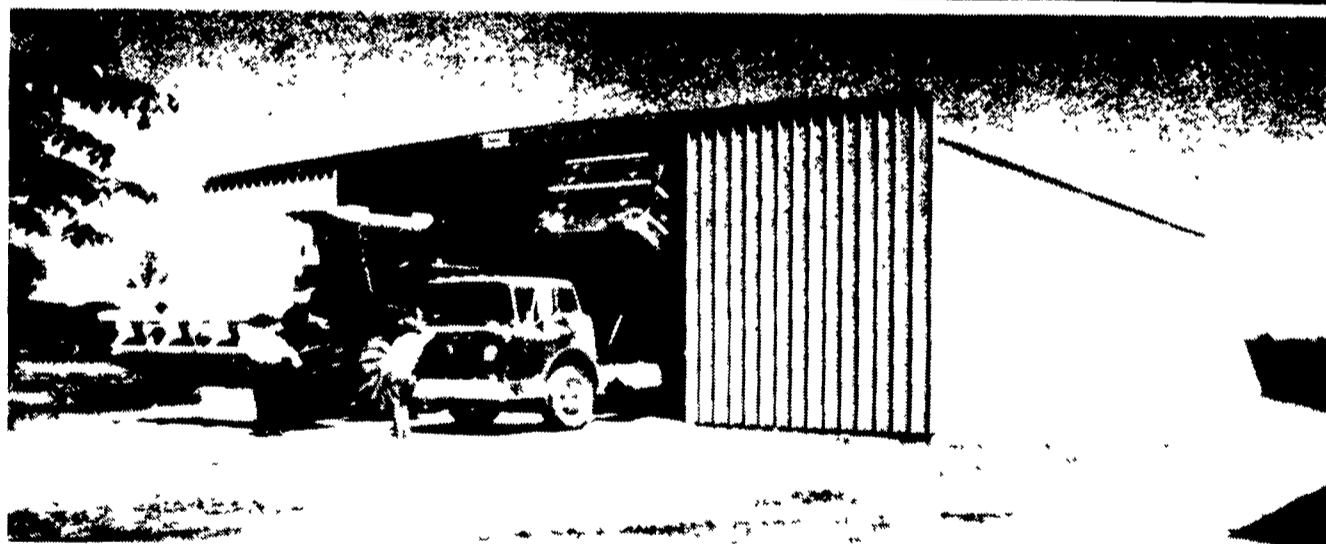


Flip up windows for added ventilation and outside grazing pens are two of the features the Smysers incorporated into their dry cow and maternity facility.

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