

Heifer raising - a new angle, synchronization and tie stalls

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

EAST BERLIN — Call it what you like: mass mating, timed insemination, breeding by appointment. Whatever the label, a breeding technology developed for the beef industry can be a positive dairy management tool, given the right set of circumstances.

At least that's the way the Rodman Thompson family sees it.

The Thompsons operate a 62-head milking herd on East Berlin Road, near the western York County border. This has been home for Jane, Rod and their children since May of 1959, when they moved their 26 milking registered Holsteins away from development pressures in Bucks County.

The farm they had been renting there belonged to the Duchess of Luxembourg. Core Creek flowed just fifty yards away in the valley, spawning the name Core-Dale, etched in a giant stone in the barn, for the farm. Thompsons had kept their Holsteins in the barn that had originally housed a Guernsey herd. But post-war urban sprawl, in the form of Levittown, was encroaching on the area's farmland, and eventually the Duchess' estate went underwater. Today, this farm lies under the lake of the Core Creek Recreational Park.

After farming for about twenty years in York County, Thompsons had the opportunity to expand acreage with the purchase of an adjoining property. They were somewhat crowded for heifer facilities, and the tie-stall barn that came with the purchase offered adaptable heifer housing.

Oldest son, Rod, Jr., was milking his own string of cows, daughter

Shirley and her husband Larry Trimmer were raising their family in a new home between the two farms and Roy, the youngest, planned to join the family business after high school graduation.

Along with raising her own family, Shirley had maintained an intense interest in the family herd. She opted to take charge of the calf and heifer raising end of the dairy operation at the second barn, with Larry lending a hand as needed in his time at home away from his off-farm job.

But a move of Rod, Jr.'s milking herd into the second tie-stall barn and a burst of heifers from the Core-Dale coincided to stretch the freestall-type facilities to the seams at the home farm's heifer pole barn.

"That was creating a crowding condition and they weren't where they could be as easily watched; I couldn't spend as much time observing them as I wanted to," Shirley relates.

When they ran across an article on heifer estrus synchronization, in a Select Sire publication, the Thompsons were initially skeptical of the idea. They related the idea to their local Atlantic technician, Charlie Greist, who encouraged the family to investigate the technique a bit further.

After a bit more education on the method through a representative from the CEVA Laboratories, originators of the Syncro-Mate-B technique, Thompsons decided they liked what they were hearing: animals could be at any stage of their estrus cycle; they could be easily be timed to freshen for the critical milk-base setting period; plans could be arranged well

ahead of time for the day's extra help that would be needed for the implanting; all calvings should also fall within a reasonably short length of time.

Shirley is quick to emphasize one point: "This heifer management tool; it suited our needs at a particular time."

That need was ten heifers inching past the Thompson preferred breeding weight and age. They aim to breed heifers at 17 months and freshen no later than 27 to 30 months, earlier with exceptionally large, growthy individuals.

On hand for the first implant procedure were not only the CEVA rep, but breeding technician Greist, and plenty of family hands to round up, corral and lend assistance. While it required perhaps a few extra hours of labor at the time, Thompsons still see the method as time-effective, compacting the work load into a few hours, rather than individual heifer chasing for endless days.

Catch chute, clippers, disinfecting solution and brush and sterile syringes were among the list of supplies on hand to make the implanting work smoothly. Cleanliness is emphasized from beginning to end - even the recommendation to use fly control sprays if the implanting takes place during fly-prone weather.

The implant resembles about a three-fourth-inch piece of clear plastic breeding rod, with a clear yellow insert in the center - the synchronizing hormone progesterin. Using a special syringe-like tool, the implant is inserted just under the skin in a clipped, sterilized area on the back of the heifer's ear. The slight bump of the implant can be felt when it is properly in place.

Insertion of the implant was followed with a two c.c. injection of a hormone mix of additional progesterin and estrogen.

Nine days later, the implant was removed. Hormones were dissolved, the tiny capsule outer shell had softened, and could easily be removed from beneath the skin. Within 48 to 54 hours, the Thompsons were to expect the first signs of heat. "We actually started to observe signs of heat even a little earlier than that," according to Shirley.

In the interim, matings had been carefully selected, and the coinciding heats even allowed for splitting of semen units. Rod, Roy and technician Greist all assisted with the insemination procedures.

Five of the ten heifers settled on the first service. The remaining five all conceived on the second service.

All calved normally, within time spans of five days of the due date. None lost a fetus, and six of the ten had heifer calves.

"But we still prefer to breed on natural service," Shirley emphasizes again. "This is a management tool. If we needed to, we'd synchronize again. It offers the genetic advantage of selecting proven A.I. sires for heifers, rather



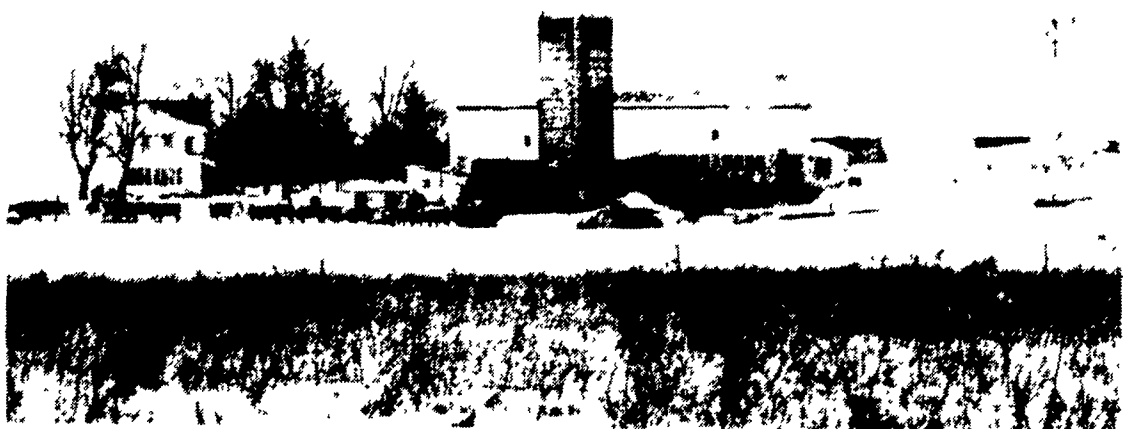
The Thompson family gathers in their tie-stall heifer raising facility: from left are Shirley Thompson Trimmer, Tammy, Roy, Jane and Rod Thompson, with Chad and Amy Trimmer up front with a four-legged friend.



Cold Springs Tony Delight accepts a hay handout from Chad and Amy Trimmer. The two-year-old will freshen shortly and sell at the young cow and bred heifer sale of the Pennsylvania On Parade extravaganza the last week of March.



Rod Thompson and daughter Shirley Trimmer demonstrate the method of inserting estrus synchronization hormone implants in heifers. Implant goes in the back of the ear.



Snow lends a wintry look to the pasture and farmstead at the Rod Thompson family's Core-Dale farms.

than breeding them to a barnyard bull."

Use of that tool at Core-Dale hasn't been necessary, however. The second stall barn is again available for heifer raising, and the Thompson family is sold on the benefits of tie-stall care for yearling and bred heifers.

Tied each day in the stalls, heifers become familiar with the routine. After morning feedings of corn silage, clover-timothy hay and fifteen-percent protein grain mix, they're turned out for pasture exercise, and to facilitate stall cleanup.

"The stall care allows for more individual attention, better health care, feeding according to weight and need," says Shirley. An added bonus is that when they freshen, they're accustomed to coming into stalls and being tied." And, with Chad and Amy Trimmer often in the barn while their mother works with the young stock, these heifers soon become used to voices, toys, and people moving among them.

Estrus cycles are charted on the heifers starting at 14 months of age, with heat detectors put on individuals scheduled to display heat signs. Monthly herd checks keep track of individuals to watch and conception successes, flagging silent heats and reproductive problems before they become critical.

The extra care being paid to replacements is already paying off.

"Our two-year-olds are averaging two thousand pounds more now than our heifers used to in their first lactation," affirms Jane. A few of the most recently fresh heifers put on DHIA testing are milking over 80 pounds daily, with none below 65-pounds-per-day production.

Thompsons see this as a step toward their long range goal of both improved genetics and increased individual production. Long-term goal at Core-Dale, says Jane, is to up their present 62-head average of 16,300 and 600 fat to the 20,000-pound area on 50 head, to provide a desired income level for the families involved.

Showing and merchandising get their share of attention at Core-Dale. Their 1986 show schedule opened with a debut at the Farm Show, and summer shows are already penciled on the calendar.

Headed for the March 28 Pennsylvania On Parade Holstein sale at Harrisburgh is a growthy two-year-old, due to freshen this week. Sired by Mars Tony, she's from a herd favorite, a Very Good, 22,000-pound Conductor daughter of the noted Cold-Springs Star Codee cow, an EX-92-2E Ivanhoe Star bred and developed by Marylander Marlin Hoff.

Wilson appointed Ag Deputy

HARRISBURG — Gov Dick Thornburgh has announced the appointment of Kirk R. Wilson, former deputy executive assistant to the governor, as deputy secretary in the Department of Agriculture.

"This administration has been well served by these very competent people in the past, and I am confident that they will continue their records of outstanding public service in their new positions," said Thornburgh, in announcing several executive promotions.

Wilson, who was elected mayor of Carlisle (Cumberland County) last November, is a former radio and television reporter in Harrisburg and spent three years on the staff of the House of Representatives. He also has worked for the Governor's Energy Council and the Governor's Press Office.

In his new position, Wilson will be responsible for the bureaus of Marketing, Farm Show and Agricultural Development.

He will be paid an annual salary of \$45,000.