

New Manure System Fits Kemerer's Needs

BY MARGIE FUSCO
Cambria County Correspondent
LATROBE — The land has been good to the Kemerer family. And the Kemerers are trying to be good to their land. Roy and Thelma Kemerer raised six children on the 110-acre farm they bought in 1949 in R.D. 3 Latrobe, and they're proud of the results. That's why they were chosen to host the Pennsylvania Ayrshire Field Day, held on July 19.

Slightly more than a year ago, Roy and his son and partner Rick knew they needed a better way to handle manure for their mixed Holstein and Ayrshire herd. They began studying systems and talking to professionals who could advise them on their options.

The Kemerers went with a bottom-fed manure pit, served by a Butler ram pump that Rick likes to call "the sausage stuffer." As visitors viewed the system, the Kemerers explained the details. Noting that the pump is as im-

portant as the choice of system, Roy told the crowd, "The pump can cost more than the pit." In Roy's case, the pump cost slightly more than \$6,000.

Rick admitted that the Kemerers had some unexpected prompting to make their decision. Not only were they concerned about the environment; they were also tired of the wear and tear on their equipment from hauling manure. Rick said before installing the new system he had to haul to a field about a half-mile away in a wet culvert. This past spring he got a tractor caught in the mud there and tore out the transmission. He admitted, "The cost of fixing the tractor was the same as the cost of the pit."

The new system, operational since April, can clean the barn in 16 minutes and is capable of handling up to 60 tons of manure per acre, more than twice what the current herd produces.

Wes Gordon, Westmoreland

County Soil Conservation Service representative who worked with Rick and Roy on their system, told the audience that the Kemerers made some key decisions before purchasing their system. He suggested that farmers facing the same change should consider: the type of bedding currently in use and whether you want to change if necessary; any future plans for herd expansion, which should be planned into the new system now; what you like or dislike about your current system; and when you prefer to do your manure spreading.

Gordon added that a system is only as good as its maintenance and that systems such as the Kemerer's must be emptied. He suggested that the audience return to the farm in a year and see the system again to properly evaluate it.

The Kemerers agreed, and noted that they could have installed a gravity flow system but would



Rick Kemerer (left) discusses aspects of the pump which was installed with his new manure system.

have had to eliminate their bedding, a choice they refused. Under the current system, Rick says, their use of straw bedding has been cut in half, from six or more bales a day to three. He is also pleased that the pump can handle manure from the heifer barn. He points out that there is no buildup problem if they alternate manure from the feed trough area with manure from the rest of the barn.

Farm Pollution: Handle With 'Common Sense'

BY MARGIE FUSCO
Cambria County Correspondent
LATROBE — Farm pollution must be handled with common sense, according to Royal Knepper, Southwest regional sales director for the Pennsylvania Farmers Association. Knepper was the featured speaker at the Pennsylvania Ayrshire Field Day, held July 19 in Westmoreland

County. Knepper pointed to an approaching crisis in the insurance industry over pollution liability settlements. "PFA offers liability insurance coverage for pollution," he explained, but added that one of the organization's four insurance carriers recently dropped its program and the other firms may follow suit. If so, farmers will be

facing a buy-back situation that will incur much higher premiums.

Although PFA is pursuing the need for lawmakers to set liability settlement limits, the organization according to Knepper is equally concerned with educating farmers to handle their pollutants more appropriately. Knepper reminded the audience that the Resource Conservation Recovery Act

(RCRA) makes it illegal to dump waste including farm chemicals and fuels, and the Comprehensive Environmental Response Conservation Liability Act (CERCLA) provides not only a superfund for rapid cleanup of pollution problems but also a stepped-up process for taking action against polluters.

"That means a farmer who's driving home with a year's supply of chemicals and wrecks his truck is liable for legal action if the chemicals spill," Knepper said. He explained that PFA's insurance coverage extends to "sudden and accidental" pollution but does not cover long-term pollution such as manure seepage. He added that even though insurances do not consider seepage as "sudden," the court system does, and a farmer with manure seepage problems can be prosecuted under the law.

One insurer, in dropping its pollution liability coverage, wrote that "every farmer and rancher is a potential polluter" and that it was abandoning its coverage because cleanup and settlement costs "have grown to beyond comprehension."

Knepper urged his audience to take measures on their own farms and within groups to eliminate pollution problems. Among his suggestions:

- Inspect your manure facilities regularly. Keep them well maintained, fenced and posted with signs at manure pits and lagoons, and padlocked at manure tanks.

- Apply chemicals only as directed on the packaging. Then dispose of the remaining chemicals and the packaging properly.

- Consider weather and wind conditions before spreading manure, burning brush, or applying chemicals.

- Protect streams from excessive cattle use by controlling usage and by maintaining your stream fencing.

- Dispose of oil and farm fuels properly. Do not dump them on your property, even in small amounts.

- Have your soil tested to be sure you use only the chemicals you need.

- Consult your Soil Conservation Service representative and other knowledgeable professionals. Then follow their advice.

- Support policies that will help define and limit insurance claim settlements.

- Discuss pollution safety precautions in groups.

- Use common sense, always.



Wes Gordon, Westmoreland County Soil Conservation representative (left), with Roy and Rick Kemerer, explained Kemerer's new manure system to the crowd at the recent Ayrshire Field Day. The pit for this system is in the background.

Westmoreland Farmers Compute With New USDA Program

BY MARGIE FUSCO
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PLEASANT UNITY — "I'm a farmer, not a bookkeeper," Frank admits, leaning down from his tractor seat.

Ralph Frye has to laugh. It's not that Frye, a Westmoreland County farmer from Pleasant Unity, doesn't like Frank. It's just that he's already heard the same story four times this morning.

"Frank" is an actor appearing

on the laserdisc video presentation that accompanies the computer program Frye is using. The test program, created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and tested in 15 states, was recently tried through the Extension Service in Westmoreland County.

"If the program catches on, I understand there will be a library of them to use," explains county agent Gary Sheppard. Programs will help farmers select crops,

work out their taxes, compile business paperwork, and even identify troublesome weeds.

The cash flow planning program, tested in Westmoreland County, was presented to a dozen farmers, three lenders, and the county extension agents for use and evaluation over a one-month period.

Frye found the program helpful. "I never ran a cash flow before, but I can see from this that I should run one," he admits. With a medium-sized dairy operation, Frye found a lot of similarities between his and "Frank's" problems. Frye notes that the video accompaniment to the program made it much more interesting. "If someone just tells you, 'You should do a cash flow,' you probably won't. This program gives me more of a feeling for it, makes it less scary. It doesn't seem as difficult now."

Sheppard agrees. "I've had people with no computer experience at all use this program easily. It teaches you a boring subject in an interesting way."

The program is divided into two parts. During the first session, the participant learns about cash flow planning from the computer, the



Gary Sheppard (left), Westmoreland County Extension Agent, instructs Ralph Frye, dairy farmer from Pleasant Unity, in using the computer.

video, and a workbook. During the second session, the participant is supposed to run his or her actual cash flow plan, using the program.

Jerry and Jane Schimpf of R.D. 4, Somerset were particularly interested in the second half of the program. Already familiar with computers, they came looking for some specific answers for making

their two-year-old dairy operation more profitable. "We've done a lot almost by accident," Jane says, noting that Jerry's hobby of raising turkeys has turned into a profitable sales venture.

"It's been too hard to plan between the shots in the arm we get with turkey and hog sales,"

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Jane and Jerry Schimpf go over their worksheets for the cash flow plan prior to entering this data into the computer.