

Index Discussion Highlights Berks Holstein Picnic

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Berks Co. Correspondent

VIRGINVILLE — The rain that released much of Berks County from its parched conditions last week, took a break on Thursday, the 31st, to allow Berks County Holstein breeders to enjoy their annual picnic. Hosted by Ernest and Joyce Miller and family on their beautiful 200 cow dairy farm near Hamburg, the catered picnic drew over 50 Holstein enthusiasts for a day out. A dairy judging contest and guest speaker, Don Seipt of Keystone Farm, Easton, provided a relaxing and informative day for county dairymen.

"Indexes certainly have become a controversy this past year," Seipt began his presentation on cow indexes and the conflicts. He spoke of the two recent Holstein meetings where breeders began voicing their frustrations and concerns for the direction of the breed because of the questionable influence of indexes.

Seipt spoke of a need to include an emphasis on durability or longevity, and more influence from the maternal side in future cow indexes. But change is slow, the noted Holstein breeder admitted. He guessed that it would be three to five years before any change is made.

"We will always have indexes,"

he told breeders. Seipt explained that the indexes are needed to rank both male and female cattle. Ranking by index "tends to make a pyramid of Holstein cattle," Seipt explained. "The future of the breed is dependent on the top one to two percent of the pyramid," he went on to say. "We just have to get the right cattle at the top," he stated.

"It is an ongoing battle to find honest data with the stakes so high," Seipt continued. He spoke of the premium values placed on the top one to two percent of the pyramid and the breeders' efforts to put a cow or bull at the top. "It's human nature to try to alter the system to gain a spot at the top," he stated, but added, "we still have a lot of honest people in the breed."

The most valuable information concerning sires and cows is "the stuff that doesn't get in print," the well known dairymen continued. He mentioned data such as her-

nias, and udders dropping in the third lactation as missing from any summaries. He also mentioned heritability factors and the need to breed for one or two improvements per breeding. "Improvements are slow," he added.

"For us at Keystone, getting milk has not been our biggest challenge ... improving type has," Seipt stated.

The noted breeder advised dairymen to cull harder. "The Holstein Association has felt the need to put pressure on breeders to stay ahead of the commercial herds," he explained. "A registered herd owner keeps too many cattle because they have papers," he insisted. "We must cull harder."

Seipt concluded by advising dairymen to use their own judgement and "work the best we can in our own situation."

After the afternoon presentation,


prizes were awarded to many of the top places in the dairy judging contests. Men, women and juniors received prizes donated by area agri-businesses.

Dean Hartman, chairman of the upcoming Berks County Holstein Sale, reported that the 53 consignments "look good" and everyone is hoping for a good sale. The sale is scheduled for August 28 at the Reading Fairgrounds pavilion. Featured in the sale will be daughters of Valiant, Milu, Spirit, Conductor and Jerry. He also added many dams have records over 20,000 pounds. The Berks Holstein Club is seeking donations of hay and straw for the sale to help cut down expenses. Any interested breeders should contact Hartman.

The Junior club will also be holding a calf raffle that evening. Tickets can be purchased from any junior member.



Ernest Miller and his wife, Joyce, welcomed Berks County Holstein members to their farm for the clubs annual picnic.

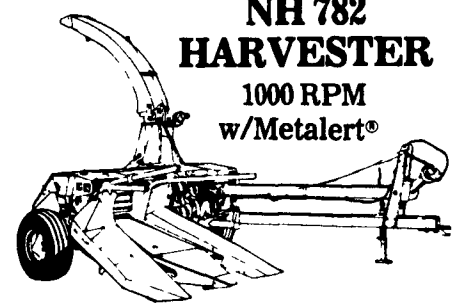


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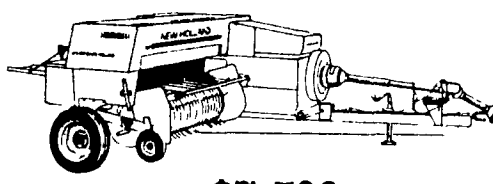
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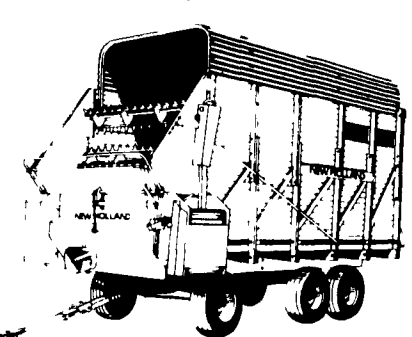
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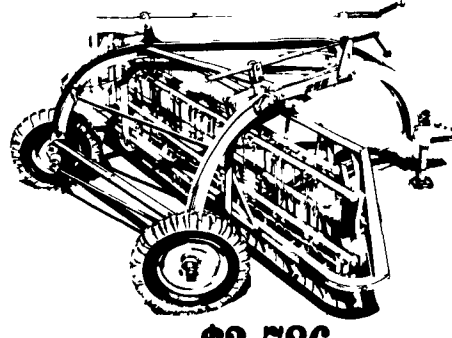
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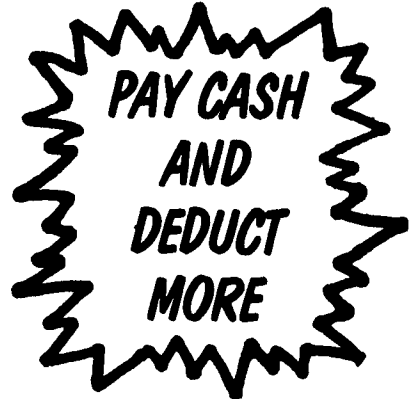
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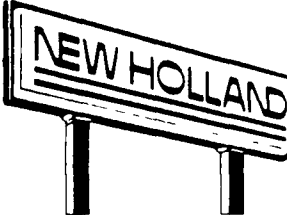
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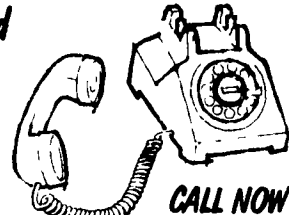
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