

Five-Way Partnership Keeps 3,000 Acre Dairy Running

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BLOOMSBURG — Welliver Brother's Farms, R.D. #5, Bloomsburg, is one of the largest farming operations in Columbia County. It is a 3,000 acre dairy, hog and grain operation presently run by second and third generation Wellivers.

The family owns 700 acres and rents an additional 2,300. Ever since the original family member, James R. Welliver, purchased the farm located on the Light Street-Fowlersville Road about 65 years ago, additional land has been purchased and rented as the operation grew.

In 1941, James' three sons, Carl, Franklin and Harold took over the farm. Fifteen years ago, Carl sold his interest. Franklin and Harold remain active along with Franklin's son, Dale, and Harold's sons, James and Ted. This five-way partnership works efficiently with each member having a specialty, but all joining in when and where help is needed.

Ted is the equipment expert. He has a three-ton truck fitted out with tools to repair and rebuild the impressive "fleet" of equipment wherever and whenever the need arises. Some of the most outstanding mobile equipment includes 15 tractors, three combines, two 18-wheel tractor trailers, two 10-wheel trucks along with a full compliment of earth moving machinery to handle their extensive conservation program.

The stationary machinery is also under Ted's care, some of which he built from scratch. For instance,

the feed grinding room is equipped with a back-up unit to insure uninterrupted service if a breakdown occurs.

The value of an on-site mechanic is realized when the Wellivers eliminated a \$70,000 repair bill for just one 12-month period.

Dale is dairy manager of the 250 head of milk cows and 275 head of young stock. An additional 20 steers are retained for personal use.

Jim is in charge of 100 sows and about 600 feeder pigs which are fed to market size and sold to Hatfield through the Danville Buying Station.

Marion Zybalski, who will be married to Jim in August, is herds-person. She, along with Lorie Derr handle the milking.

The elder Wellivers have guided their sons into responsible positions where they can now look toward retirement, or, at least, easing off the heavy pace that established the farm.

Harold's greatest interest lies in the conservation end of it and Franklin leans toward the dairy in which he manages the feeding of the large herd which is located at various sites according to age.

The dairy herd is grade Holsteins. After a production drop several years ago, production is coming back nicely and at present, runs about 13,600 pounds of milk with 3.7 to 3.9 fat test.

A DeLaval computer feeder is credited with the steady increase in production and has paid for itself (twice over) in feed savings. Although savings in feed may appear on the surface to be a

foolish saving, it is set up where each cow is fed according to her production. Because of animal nature in which the most aggressive cow "hogs" the most feed, this does not always result in the greatest producers. By way of an identifier on each cow's collar, her nutrition is matched to her output, thus correcting the notion that a big eater produces the most milk.

Under this computer feeding plan, if a cow doesn't consume her measured portion each 24 hours, she has a couple of days to catch up on the ration programmed for her. At the end of that time, her program begins anew and she again has a couple of days to complete her nutrition schedule. But, the important feature is, no other cow can move in and eat what is programmed for her. The identifier on her collar activates the computerized feeding station to deliver her portion in as many trips to the feed box as she requires. If her programmed amount is scheduled for four feedings, she can get that and no more in a day's time, but if she makes less trips to the feeding station, the uneaten portion carries over for the extra days, giving her ample time to consume the full amount.

With such a large herd, the computer has a constant check on each animal affording the herds-person and manager time to catch a problem before it becomes serious.

An addition to the system is presently being installed and will be hooked into the collection system in the milk parlor. This will eliminate extensive monitoring by the programmer on each cow by being computed instantly upon her collection.

Ted's wife, Rhonda, is the computer expert, an area that has become a vital tool in efficiency and economy. Dale is also easing into this area providing a back-up operator, and, as herd manager, can keep a feel on the pulse of the herd's activity.

Calves are taken from the cow upon freshening and moved to a cluster of 27 hutches. Franklin says the hutches have reduced the calf mortality rate considerably by providing a healthy atmosphere for acclimating the young stock to weathering as opposed to the high population in the maternity barn which created risky survival rate.

The herd is fed high moisture corn, soybeans and minerals by way of feeding stations in the free-stall area where they are housed.

Afternoon milking begins at 2:30 p.m. It takes three-and-one-half hours for two people to milk in a



Dale Welliver, dairy manager, is helping install additional computer equipment in the double-six milking parlor.

double-six milking parlor, including clean up. By scheduling an early afternoon start, workers can finish at a reasonable time.

Four farms were combined to make up the main 700 acre farm. An additional 24 farms are rented to make up the balance of the 3,000 under cultivation. All of this land is carefully evaluated for erosion and proper conservation steps are taken to prevent soil loss.

Last year Welliver Farms was selected as the Conservation Farmers of the Year. At that time (October 1986), conservation practices included 48,000 feet of diversions, 4,500 feet of waterways, 25,000 feet of tile and contour strips. The Wellivers have not done conventional plowing in three years adding to the conservation program. Another 6,000 feet of

work is planned for this summer.

Harold decided a long time ago there was only one right way of farming and that was to preserve the land, some of which had heavy washing areas. The rented land is treated in the same manner as the main farm. The Wellivers have their own equipment for the various conservation programs, so all land under cultivation is cared for at the Welliver's expense.

Manure is hauled daily. Rain water run-off around the barn and animal housing is diverted into a lagoon which requires a yearly cleaning.

A 50 by 262 foot Quonset storage holds machinery and shelled corn. Harold points out the additional and numerous pieces of equipment parked behind and around the

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Ted Welliver is the equipment repairman. He meets every emergency by traveling to it with his well-equipped three ton truck. A great savings is realized by having an on-site mechanic. One year recently, the yearly repair bill ran \$70,000.



One cluster of the calf hutches. When Wellivers purchased these hutches, they had to travel outside Pennsylvania. Since that time, limited production of the units has begun within the state.



Franklin Welliver manages the feeding of the large herd of cattle. This is one of the units in which he hauls feed to the various herds. The feeding stations are fed automatically through overhead pipes from the preparation room. Young and dry stock are housed in other areas on the farm where feed is transported by wagon.