

Star Farmer Sets Sights On National Honor

**By Craig Bingman
Snyder Co. Correspondent**
BLAIRS MILLS (Huntington)
— J. Richard Speer is not only following in his father's footsteps in dairy farming, he also is repeating a feat accomplished by the elder Speer in 1958. "Rich" Speer, like his father, James Speer Jr. 30 years ago, is the FFA Eastern Region Star Farmer.

The 1985 Southern Huntingdon High School graduate is one of four regional star farmers being considered for the title of Star Farmer of America at the FFA National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri on November 10. The convention runs from November 10th through the 12th and expects to draw more than 22,000 FFA members, advisors, supporters, and guests from 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Speer is the son of Henrietta and James Speer, Jr. "I've been interested in farming ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper," says Speer. "When I was 8 years old, my dad gave me my first calf."

Farming by a 50-50 partnership with his father since January of 1985 when he was a high school senior, Rich has swelled his current net worth to \$172,337, started from a loan and money earned from his Supervised Occupational Experience Program in FFA. The partnership includes two farms totaling 260 acres of corn, wheat, alfalfa, and oats. The father and son team manage 100 head of holsteins, of which 61 are currently averaging near 18,000 pounds with a 3.8% test.

"We own 180 acres tillable and rent 80 acres," adds Speer. Their 560 total acres are divided between Juniata and Huntingdon Counties, where the Tuscarora and Shade Mountains surround their Speerette Farms.

While in high school and after graduation, Speer was quite active in FFA activities. Among his FFA offices, honors, and activities are: Chapter Star Farmer; chapter secretary, treasurer, vice president; DeKalb Agricultural Award; state FFA band; chapter public speaking, dairy judging, parliamentary procedure; state FFA treasurer; state star farmer; state dairy production proficiency award; Eastern States Star Farmer.

Community activities include: Holstein-Friesian Association—local, state, and national member; PA Farmer's Association; Southern Huntingdon Young Farmer's; Lions Club; Sunday School secretary and elder; Sire Power Inc. member; Atlantic Breeders Cooperative member; Maryland Virginia Milk Cooperative member.

Each of the regional star farmers will receive \$1,000 from the National FFA Foundation, with the national winner receiving an additional \$1,000. The four regional stars were selected from candidates nominated for the American Farmer Degree, which is awarded to less than two tenths of one percent of the organization's 404,500 members.

"They judge the interviews and the content of the application for Star Farmer," says Speer. "They (judges) even ask you to bring your record books from 9th grade until the present."

Speer is a farmer that pays special attention to today's agricultural innovations. Using the embryo transfer (ET) successfully, he has



J. Richard Speer

witnessed the result of two heifer calves from superior bloodlines. Utilizing his own artificial insemination



Rich Speer, shown here getting ready to harvest haylage, is a full partner with his father.

skills, he also has been able to increase breeding efficiency. "With AI, timing is everything," he says. "If you get someone else

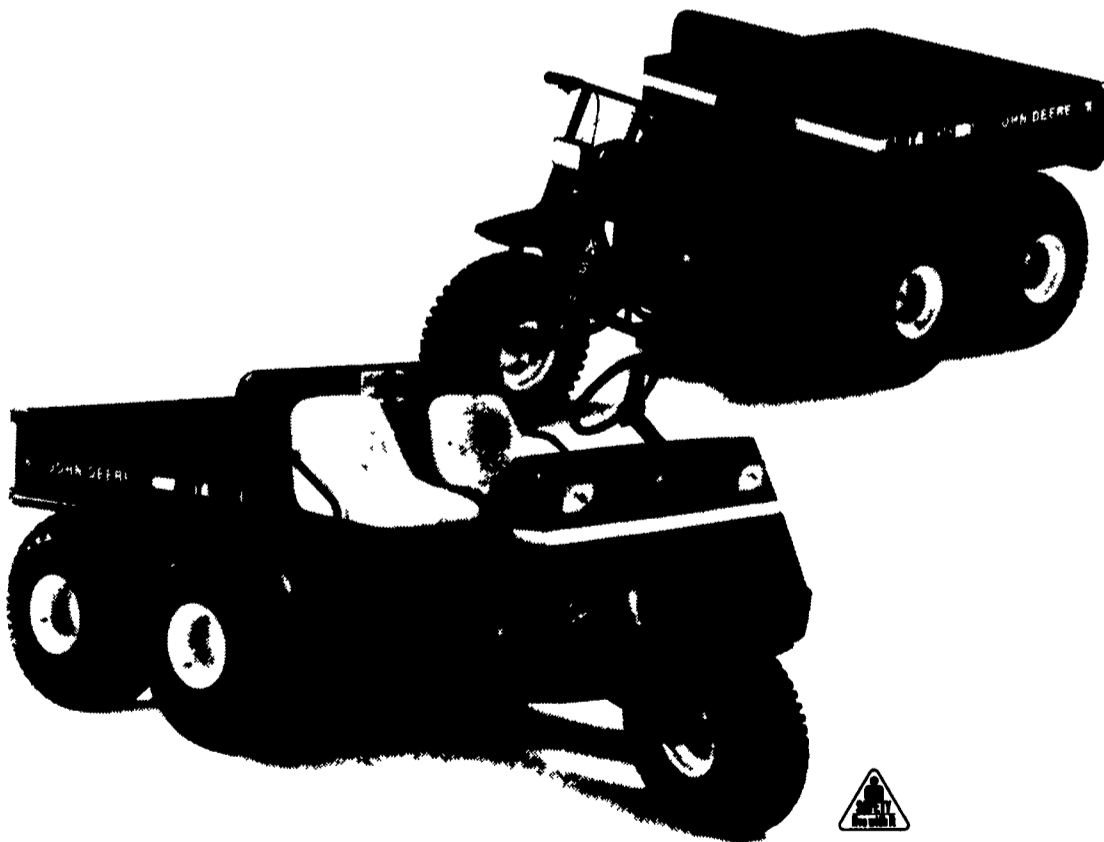
to breed your cows, you're stuck with when they breed them. If I do it myself, I can breed them when they need to be bred."

Also, Speer introduced a new feeding system that allows for lactating cows to be fed grain individually.

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