

# Determined To Dairy Farm

(Continued from Page B2)

Dale says of those initial months of dairying.

Changes in his feeding program, including the addition of fats, put more energy in the ration. Though more costly, the change has gotten results. Cows now average 64 pounds per day, compared to the 50-pound level he fought to maintain some months.

With their first year of DHIA now completed, the Ranck's initial rolling herd average on their 39 head is 17,046 milk, with a fat test averaging 3.6. While Dale worked at fine-tuning his feeding, breeding and crops programs, Miriam was rapidly becoming a dairy farming partner.

Although initially apprehensive of the cows, she quickly learned milking chores, care of the calves, and helping with milkhouse clean-up. By the time they took their delayed wedding trip to Florida last July, Miriam had become so interested in the herd that she had questions about individual cows each time they called home to check.

"It surprised me," she chuckles of the deep interest she quickly took in the herd. Since the couple is expecting their first child in July, Miriam has given up helping with milking and some of the more physically strenuous farm chores.

"Who says we can't make a go of it?" Dale challenges those who

would suggest dairying is almost impossible for a young couple to break into, due to high investment costs. "If others can do it, so can we."

"But, you don't start 'on top of the pile,'" he quickly adds. "And, you can't start out broke."

"It's a great help to have someone behind you and advise you," believes Dale. "I was fortunate to have the opportunity; not everyone does. And, it's almost impossible without that. My father was in no way pushing; he wanted to make sure I had the commitment to stick with it. My parents purchased the farm, and we cash rent it from them."

Absolutely certain he wanted to farm, Dale had saved carefully during the years he worked after graduation. He weighed the temptation of items like snowmobiles, four-wheelers, and expensive pickups against eventual cow purchases - and the cows won. With no need to build a house, Miriam's land could likewise be used toward acquiring a herd and machinery.

Equipment for corn planting and hay baling is the only machinery the Rancks own. Custom operators are hired for such jobs as filling silos and grain harvest. And, with his family not too far away, machine-sharing is sometimes done.

Expansion to 50 cows and adding equipment are intermedi-

ate goals for the Rancks, but paying off debt is the couple's prime focus for the present. Ultimate goal is to purchase the farm from Dale's parents, through improving the Oak Lane herd's production and holding costs, to maintain cash flow levels for servicing long-term debt.

But there are no plans to grow beyond the one-family operation size.

"We need dairy farmers," says Dale. "Someone has to milk those cows. And I believe we ought to have more 40-50 cow herds, and less 100-cow herds. Forty head is about what one man and his family can handle."

"However, we must be here every day to milk. Larger operations allow more time off. But if it's a partnership, and someone gets tired and wants out, what do you do? Bigger sized farms demand more continuous labor, and there seems to be a shortage of good bosses and good employees."

One of his major concerns for the future of dairying is the issue of BST, Bovine Somatotrophin. Not only is he bothered by the idea of frequent injections of the hormone into cows, but also by the potential for controversy that may offer animal rightist groups. Dale

feels that the use of such technologies as BST and possible future success in sexing of semen is getting pretty close to overstepping the bounds in "fooling around with nature."

"It's like someone being able to control of the rain. In the long run, God knows what's best," he staunchly believes.

Protein pricing is another issue he expects dairymen to face soon, as consumer concern over fat continues to grow.

"But if dairy farmers keep getting paid based on butterfat, we'll keep on producing butterfat," figures Dale.

With their goal of dairy farming reached and well-under way, Dale and Miriam are quick to credit his family, whose support played a major role in making that happen. He also praises the efforts of Paul and Kathy King, for their improvements and developments

in facilities for the herd and their comfortable home.

"We're very fortunate to have a place with a new stall barn and new home. I think some of our friends are given hope by seeing what Paul could accomplish here. It's an example of how someone can start with a few inconveniences and build from there," he says with admiration.

For others considering the long-term commitment to dairying, Dale stresses the importance of having some financial savings toward startup.

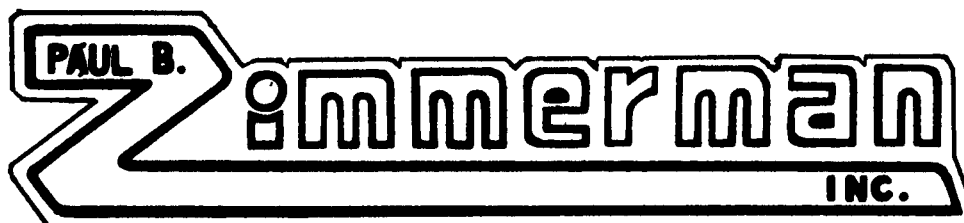
"Get a job and save some money. It takes some sacrificing at those times when you'd like to spend for something else. And buy wisely; you can get nice things without paying the highest price for the very best. You don't have to buy some item just because everyone else has it."

And, likely his most important advice of all is, "You must really want to do it."

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Despite rain and chilly weather, Miriam has been planting flowers and vegetables in the garden and flowerbeds at their Delta farm.



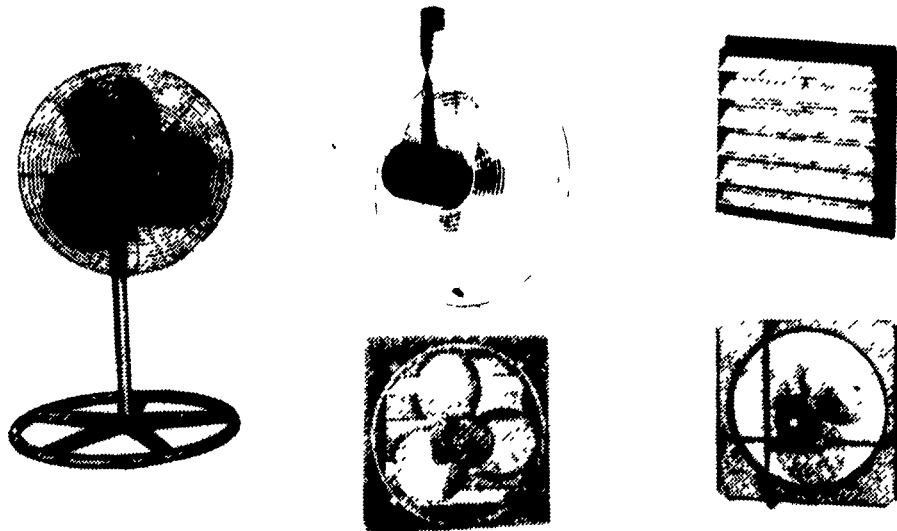
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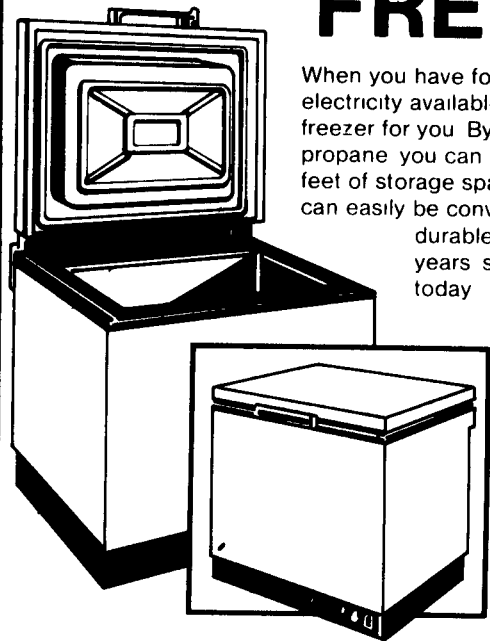
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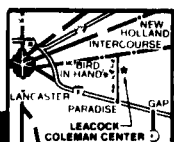
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