

# Dairying On The Mountain

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potato growers, vineyards and a fair representation of other types of agricultural production, including dairy farms. But, for the most part, upstate dairy farms have not been as ingrained to the local culture as downstate operations.

Being classified as a Dairy of Distinction can turn some heads in Tioga and surrounding counties.

Still the differences between an upstate dairy and a downstate dairy — similar to the country mouse-city mouse tale — are drawn on fact. They really are different.

According to David Butters, 35, the differences might be considerable.

On the positive side, the 350 tillable acres is enough land to handle the nutrient load from the manure produced from a total 130 grade Holsteins.

Futhermore, run-ins with neighbors' and complaints about odors aren't frequent upstate. In the southern and central regions of the state, lawsuits are not uncommon.

The Butters' farm sits on a relatively flat mountain top. For fall beauty, the view from the Butters' farm consists of light tan fields of dried corn stalks or ready-to-harvest soybeans that contrast with the green of hay fields.

The backdrop is almost dramatic — rolling mountains of red and orange foliage that turn to purple and blue in the distance.

Other bonuses to upstate farming have to do with the weather — the summer's heat isn't quite as hot as in the low-lying valley farms of southern Pennsylvania. The humidity rarely becomes sweltering.

Traffic is minimal, for most of

the year. Driving a tractor several miles to a field does not result in long lines of cars and hazardous passes.

But there are some good reasons why the Butters are one of only four dairy farms in Morris Township.

The 350 acres of land tilled by the Butters (some rented) is mostly thin soil compared to the fertile limestone valley fields of south central and south eastern Pennsylvania.

The winter snow gets deeper and more frequent. The growing season isn't as long and deer are a constant problem.

For whatever reasons, milk production from northern tier herds isn't generally as high as in the southern Pennsylvania counties.

The typical upstate farm is a beef operation with sometimes steep hillside pastures and cattle trails worn deeply.

Nevertheless, the Butters are dairymen and they are as much a part of the Nauvoo-area community as the area's three-times-daily chimes that echo from St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

The church chimes can be relied upon to ring out promptly at 8 a.m., noon and 6 p.m.

The Butters can be relied upon to make milk.

Raymond and Peggy Butters are the parents of the outfit. They are — more or less — retired, but live on the 250-acre farm. Three of their four sons run things.

David and brother Terry, 30, operate the farm in a fulltime partnership. Glen Butters, 27, teaches math at Troy Middle School in Bradford County and works at the farm on weekends.

The fourth son, Gary, 34, has a mobile home business in Mansfield.

The Butters dairy heritage started in Tioga in 1906 when Raymond's father, David Grant Butters, bought a 100-acre farm. It's been going strong since.

The farm is a free-stall and double-six herringbone parlor operation. The milking herd numbers 79 grade Holsteins. With heifers and calves, the total number of animals averages about 130.

The brothers make their own straw and raise alfalfa and timothy, soybeans, corn and oats.

Since the brothers concentrate on milk production, registration of their Holsteins isn't important, David said.

However, a good cow is a good cow.

"We've had a few of them have 23,000 pounds of milk," David said. "In our last report we had two ... one with 20,820 pounds, a 4-year-old, and 20,275 pounds, a three-year-old," he said.

Heifer calves that are not being kept for replacement stock, and bull calves, are raised just long enough to be sold at auction.

The farm is also marked by its three-sided structure built to house eight calf hutches. The structure was actually built to protect from inclement weather, whomever feeds the calves.

The calves do well with or without the superstructure. In fact, David said that in the past eight years, since switching to hutches, he has lost only one calf.

Eleven years ago, Raymond Butters built an earthen manure lagoon capable of holding up to six months worth of waste. It is

thought to be the first such conservation structure in the county, David said.

Some recent changes to the farm have been significant. Four years ago the herd went on test and started using sample sires through Sire Power Inc., and at the same time switched to a computerized feeding system.

According to David, the combination of the two changes has caused a 2,700-pound increase in annual rolling herd average of milk production. At the same time, feed was cut by 100 pounds high moisture corn and 50 pounds protein supplement a day.

The herd average for June was reported as 16,760 pounds milk, 576 pounds butterfat and 552 pounds protein. When the herd was first put on test, it recorded a 14,000 pounds milk rolling herd average.

In addition to regular farm chores, the brothers also do some custom combining work.

The fields have changed over the years, David said. Stone fence rows between fields, common to the area, had been eliminated when soil conservation work was done.

"We have to pick stone and we have a few drainage problems, but we work with ASCS (USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service) with tiling and contour strips," David said. "Pretty much all of our land is in contour strips and pretty much of all of the rented ground is contoured."

No major additions to the operation are planned, David said. But there are some recent invisible, but major changes to all the dairy farms in Morris Township.

"We just got an ag security area

started in Morris Township," David said. The total is at least 2,200 acres of land put into agricultural security.

David said his uncle, Joe Bohner, "has just a little over 500 acres by himself and he said he was going to do it, even if no one else did. He said it's something that would be helpful in the future."

According to David, a lot of the farmland in the area has been lost to out-of-state real estate speculators who have been purchasing large areas, subdividing them into small parcels and selling them as hunting camps or vacation sites.

To help keep the Butters farm in farming, he said the operation is also signed up under the Clean and Green program — a real estate tax break incentive program to keep land from being used for residences, even those used as vacation homes or camps.

"That kind of ties you up from selling for anything other than farming purposes," David said.

The Butters are members of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association and were one of the first in the county to use its accounting services, when the program was initially offered.

Raymond and Peggy have been members of the Grange and will soon observe 50 years with the organization.

In addition to farming the Butters' sons have been active members of the Morris Fire Co. since teenagers and respond to a number of calls each year. The hardest time for northern tier fire companies is in March when dry forests and strong winds can and does claim large numbers of square miles of

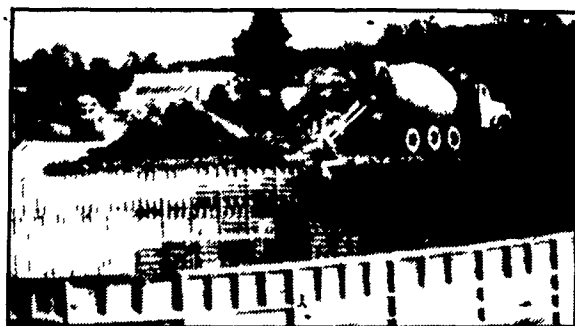
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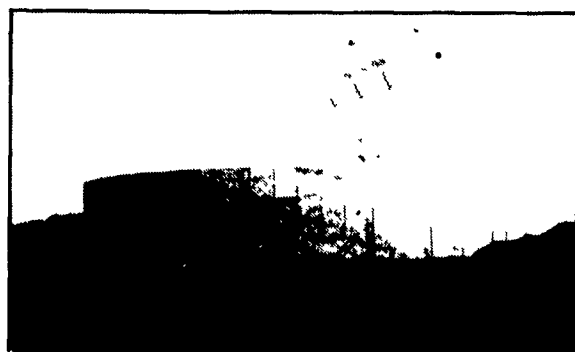
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