

Dairyman's Herd

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The dairy operation is under the guidance of James and, within three years, the dairy has gone from being the new boy on the block to leading producer in the county.

End-of-year records from the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association (Pa. DHIA) attest to the determination of the young dairyman to create a strong business.

Dunn has 58 animals on test — 35 registered Holsteins and 23 grade. From 1989 to 1990, the herd has gone from a rolling herd average of 18,571 pounds of milk to 24,220 pounds of milk. That's an average increase of 5,649 pounds of milk per cow.

The protein average has gone from 594 pounds to 796 pounds. That's an average increase of 202 pounds of protein per cow.

And almost as out-of-the-norm as is the location of the farm, Dunn didn't grow up with a dairy background.

Instead, James Dunn's agricultural background shows a predilection toward non-dairy farming.

Even though a fan of dairy cattle since he was 12 years old, in high school his 4-H projects were beef animals. His high school vo-ag teacher even tried to talk him out of considering dairying as a business.

His father, Robert C. Dunn, advised him to be sure it was what he wanted, what his eventual wife would want, if he were to marry. Which he did.

Although the elder Dunn was involved in the fruit and vegetable business, he told his son that dairying involves perhaps more of a commitment — mentally, physically and financially — than other vocations.

Robert Dunn told his son that getting in dairying, especially today, isn't something that can be done half-heartedly.

But eventually, James convinced his family that his commitment to running a dairy farm was real. His desire to have a dairy farm did not go away between 12 and 21.

"Ever since I was 12, I wanted a dairy farm. I just always wanted cows," James said.

To make it all possible, seven years ago, the family business bought a deteriorating farmstead.

Like many others in the locale, the previous owner had dabbled in various types of agriculture. He sold potatoes and garden crops door-to-door.

The landowner was and is a friend of the Dunns and retained a portion of the property, onto which he built and lives in a new home. He make frequent trips to see what James Dunn has done to his old place.

The farmhouse was completely stripped to the frame and rebuilt. Several buildings were kept, 13 were demolished. A patch of woodland was removed from the middle of some fields, fence lines changed and contour planting started.

A modern stanchion barn was built. Three silos erected . . .

Prior to actually starting any milk production on the farm, James bought a number of heifer calves and raised them for two years. They were about to freshen when he also bought a milking herd of about 21 cows.

All the cows he bought were supposed to have been about to freshen, but six were not yet bred.

With these beginnings, the Dunns were in the dairy business.

Milk production that first year was pretty low due to the youth of more than half of the herd and the delay in freshening on a third of the older cows.

According to James, herd production had been down to just a little more than 16,000 pounds of milk.

The herd he bought had averaged a little more than 18,000 pounds of milk.

But after the first year, gains started coming rapidly.

With top feeds, better breeding, and lots of barn time, the herd started making big increases in milk.

Then Richard Hire, a herdsman, came along. He has more of a dairy background, but he also helps the Dunns with the fruit and vegetable business.

Just as others do, to keep cows semi-alert and eating, a radio and two lights stay on in the barn throughout the night.

Breeding is monitored in the barn and in the back exercise lot. He doesn't really pasture his herd per se.

He selects bulls for production and keeps one of his own clean-up

bulls for occasional use. However, he said he'll try artificial insemination up to four times on a cow before sending her to the clean-up bull.

The heifers and dry cows are kept together in a front lot with loose stall housing underneath the original bank barn.

When he first started, he kept the calves in the barn, but quickly built a six-hutch, calf-raising shed. It has three sides and an open front. He hasn't lost a calf in the past 2½ years.

Considering that he raises all his calves — the males for steers, the heifers for replacement — he said he is doing well.

He keeps the calves separated for 4 to 6 weeks in the hutches and tries to get them on grain quickly. Then they are put into groups of about five.

But more than just the dairy, James Dunn is responsible for other aspects of the Dunn Farms Inc. business.

The family operation farms about 400 acres and rents another 200. It is actually four farms combined.

They have about 75 acres of peaches and apples; 25 acres of sweet corn; 50 acres of soybeans that are roasted and fed to the cows; 125 acres of field corn (100 to 125 bushels per acre); 100 acres of alfalfa; 30 to 40 acres of rye; 30 to 40 acres of oats; 75 acres of mixed timothy and clover; and the rest in vegetables, from cantalopes and crenshaws to tomatoes.

The family also sells home-pressed apple cider and runs a market stand six days a week.

The two sons and father, the wives, and some hired help all pitch in, whenever and wherever feed all the time and a fermented feed all the time," he said.

He gives them the best of the hay that he, his brother and father

can produce. The other goes to market.

But in addition to the traditional alfalfa, clover and timothy hays, Dunn has been growing and feeding Reeds Canary grass with excellent results.

He said the green leafy grass provides several cuttings, is thick, and the cows seem to enjoy it greatly.

He gets one cutting from a field of timothy, and getting cows to eat well is one of Dunn's emphases, he said.

"One of the biggest things is body condition. When drying a cow, don't be afraid to feed her. My biggest thing is getting the proper condition on a cow and to keep it there," he said.

And to make sure his cows eat, he said the high moisture corn is great and the cows eat heartedly. Plus, he tests the protein content of his forages.

At presstime, it wasn't in place yet, but to even better the diet of his cows, Dunn was in the process of installing a total mixed ration (TMR) system. This past week he was awaiting the installation of a TMR mixer.

"Only top quality forages come into here for these animals. And we feed lesser amounts and more often," he said.

Three times a day the cows get their silage or high moisture corn meals. Four times a day they are fed some type of hay.

About 4:30 to 5 a.m., before milking, each cow gets a ration of second cutting Reeds Canary grass or a timothy mix. They get that same meal again before the evening milking.

At 10 a.m., the herd gets a meal of second cutting clover and before Dunn goes to bed, he feeds second cutting alfalfa.

Dunn has a total mixture of all his hay forages analysed and tests

show a combined result of 18 percent protein in the feed.

Together, and with information gleaned wherever possible, the two implemented changes that made the Dunn herd start making herd production gains of 800 to 900 pounds of milk per cow each month.

So far, the least amount of average milk production realized has been about 200 pounds in one month.

James' prediction is that the herd should start slowing down when it reaches an average milk production of around 26,000 pounds. But he's working for more than that. His goal is to have the highest averaging dairy herd in the state, and, of course, the most profitable.

What happened for Dunn's herd to increase milk production so dramatically seems to be a combination of several changes.

He credits the majority of the increase to his self-professed emphasis on top quality feed — out of all the hay the business produces, James gets to pick what the cows will get and what will go to market.

"I have some good genetics," Dunn said. "But I have some (cows) that do not have good genetics. I brought in some heifers from 12,000-pound herds and with feeding they make 24,000 to 26,000 pounds of milk," he said.

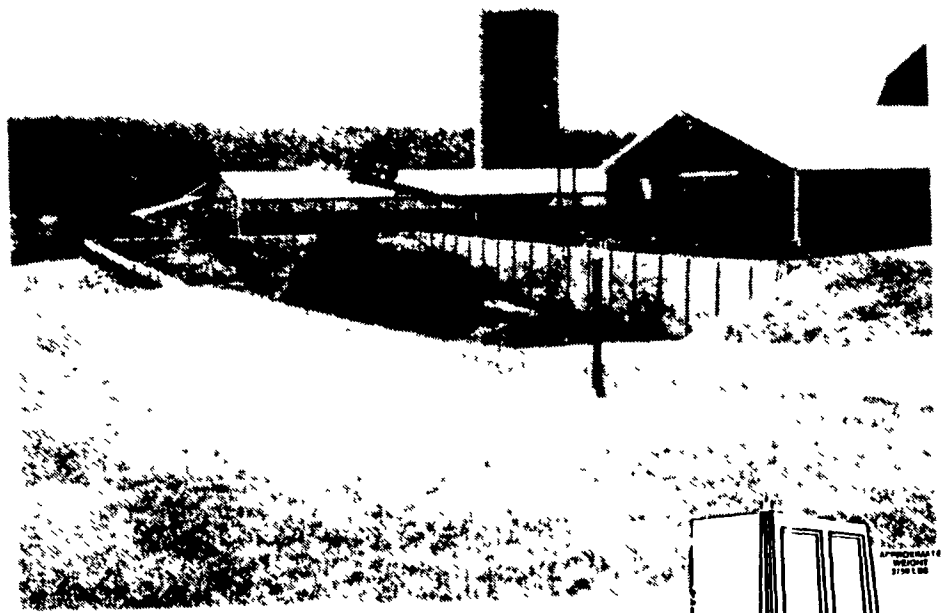
He said he sees some farmers with herds that far outshine his as far as bloodlines, but they don't pay as much attention to nutrition.

"If nutrition would equal genetics today there would be a lot of 30,000-pound cows," Dunn said.

Dunn's tools of preference in milk production include a 50-stall stanchion barn with a scraper gutter and a 2- to 3-month storage manure pit. That was built in 1987.

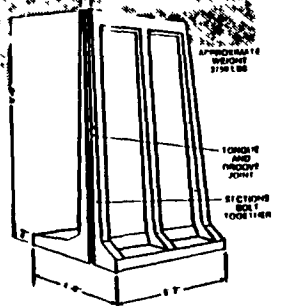
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