

Computer Helps Brothers



Steve Hershey follows a breeding chart kept in the barn. He also maintains lactation production curves on each cow, and rankings of other production factors on each cow so that he knows exactly how each is performing. Recently he culled a cow that had been near the bottom of several charts. Without the information, he may have kept her on, draining the overall efficiency of the herd.

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If there is anything of a silver lining to the pressure put on the Hersheys by the lower milk price it is that they are forced to scrutinize their practices.

"It forces you to look closely at some pre-conceived notions," Steve said.

"As much as I would like to say to the industry that staying 50 cows would be enough, going to 60 and keeping costs where they are may be the only way," he said.

"It may take buying cows to fill out the herd, and if it means breaking some pre-conceived notions about having a 100 percent homebred herd, so be it."

Steve said the pressure also has caused him to rethink his breeding program slightly.

"Milk makes money. In the past several years I've used a formula of using evenly balanced bulls. I may change that to go with higher production."

There are some other avenues, also. The current herd rolling average is 22,300 pounds of milk, 796 pounds butterfat and 693 pounds of protein. It was higher, up to 24,500.

"We're on our way back up. We had a feed problem," that Steve said is corrected.

One aspect of managing the herd is health management. Steve said he has "lost very few cows over the years. We've lost one cow due to being down during the past three to four years. Even while they're down, we milk them and feed them," he said.

Steve said such care while a cow is feeling bad helps them to recover and gain their place back in the herd. He said sometime they've had a cow down for days before it would come around. He said that

others should probably pamper ill cows a little more.

"There's an industry wide tendency to forget they (sick animals) exist," he said. "They need extra care when they're down."

With a masters degree in agricultural economics and rural sociology with a minor in anthropology, Dale started out in partnership with his father, went back to school to complete his degree, worked in extension in Clarion County for awhile, then returned to the farm to go into partnership with Steve.

Both well-educated in farming, they have specialized. "We try to run the farm as a business."

With the low milk prices however, it would seem that Dale could leave the farm, or if it became financially dangerous to keep it, for the brothers to sell the farm.

However, those aren't really options, according to the brothers.

"If it were a run-down farm that we bought, tried to make work for five years and couldn't make it go, then no one would complain if we sold it. But it's been in the family for four generations. We will try everything we can to keep it," Steve said.

Dale said he also intends to continue with farming because of his nature.

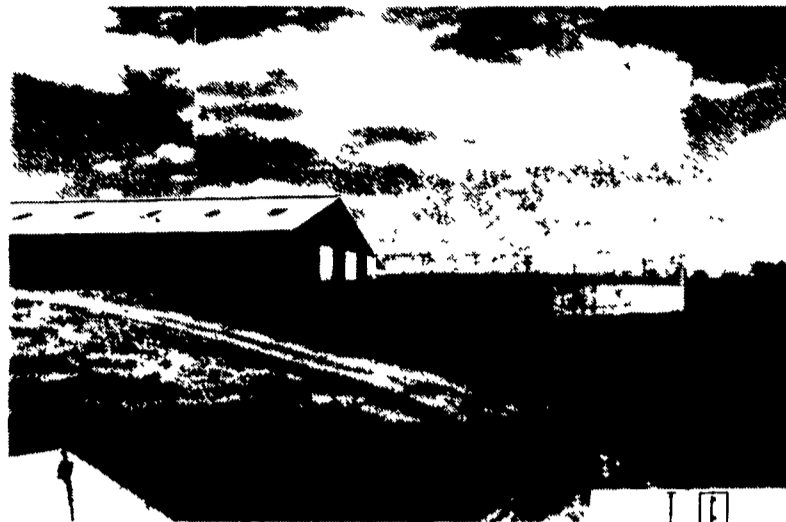
"I discovered that, while I like this, working in the office, I need hands-on. I can't be in an office all day."

The use of a computer, monthly expense reports compared to projected budget allowances, micro and macro management, just may allow the two to continue in dairying, despite fluctuating milk prices.

"We have to be flexible," Dale said.

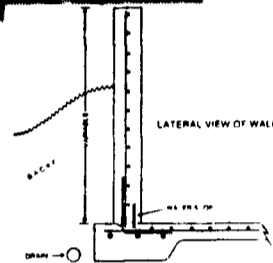
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