

Effort By

(Continued from Page A1)

Run down

"The place was pretty well run down," said Stees. "The lawn was covered with, you name it, refrigerators, trash, all sorts of garbage. I built a pond, cleaned up around the place, knocked out the fence rows, and buried all the trash."

For the next five years, Stees worked steadily on improving the property, including replacing the floor in the house (using silo wood), planting pine trees as buffer zones and windbreaks, and repairing the barn.

"When I first came into the barn, I was really amazed," he said. "I knew I had to do something, because the barn was under four feet of manure and you couldn't tell where the stanchions were."

The concrete stalls were in near shambles, which Stees quickly worked to clean and rebuild. Every year, according to Stees, he was involved in a new, large project that aimed to take care of the problems and rebuild the farm.

Work on soil

But it was the work on the land that first took the conservation farmer's attention.

"The first thing we did was put in the grassland waterways and contour strips," he said. From the day he began with the district in 1967, he has been working to repair the land under their auspices.

Steas said that some of the worst soil had a pH of 4.2. The best soil had a pH of 5.0. In the first year of planting crops, the farmer said he harvested 42 bushels of corn per acre. In the drought year of 1988, Steas said the harvest was better than the first year — and now, Steas regularly harvests about 140-150 bushels of corn per acre.

Steas keeps a "running track record" of improving the soil conditions and the property.

Major improvement

"I don't think there's been a year when I didn't put some type of major, major improvement in the property," he said. "From grassland waterways to a diversion to a building. This year I will be putting in a buffer zone of pine trees."

In addition, he recently installed a manure holding tank, which converts manure into a slurry. He uses spreading calibrations to apply the right amount of manure to the soil. The farmer also conducts regular soil and manure tests to ensure the soil is receiving the correct nutrients.

In the beginning, it was difficult to farm, because Steas had no money and took a long time in obtaining the equipment and building the herd. For the first five years, he worked as a herdsman at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center, taking what free time he had to repair the farm. In 1969, he married, and shortly after moved permanently into the farm.

Steas started out with some inexpensive calves, which he wasn't happy about, since they couldn't produce and he couldn't breed them. After he sold them, he bought 10 registered cows. One of the cows provided the foundation of the herd, birthing seven heifers in a 12-year span.

Milks 50

Steas milks 50 head of registered Holsteins with 30 replacement heifers and calves. He's raising 15 heifers this year. He grows most of his own feed, but he purchases 25-30 tons of hay per year.

The dairy operation is a comfort stall with a milking pipeline. A member of the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) since 1977, Steas thinks that the "bottom line" rules in his management decisions.

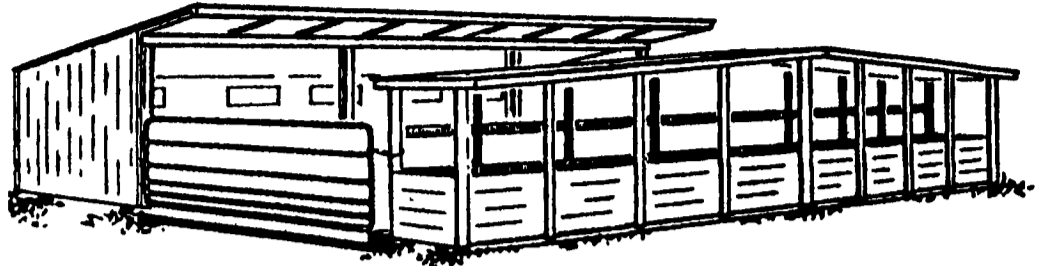
"I'm not a person that pushes high production," he said. "I'm more concerned about feed costs and the bottom line. That's my baby. A lot of people demand the production and high milk and they want records and everything else. I'd rather have the cows work for me, not me work for the cows."

Recently, his son Clinton worked on erosion control as part of a 4th grade science project. The project won first place in the school and second in the county and pinpointed a Parkesburg development that was causing erosion problems. The developer was subsequently fined for causing erosion problems at the development site.

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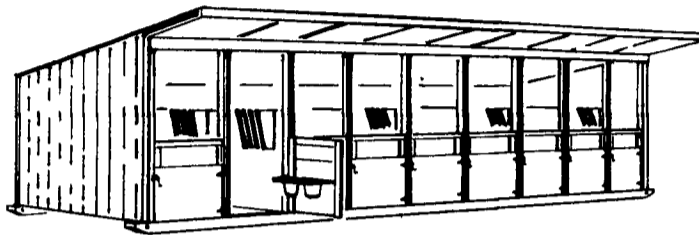


APM SUPER HUTCH AND FEEDER



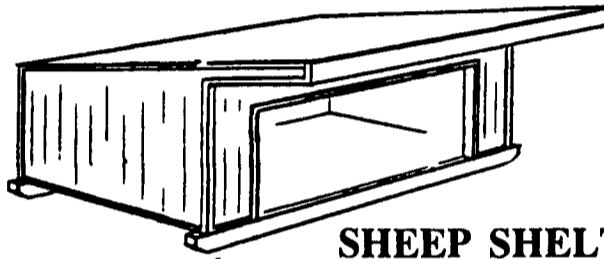
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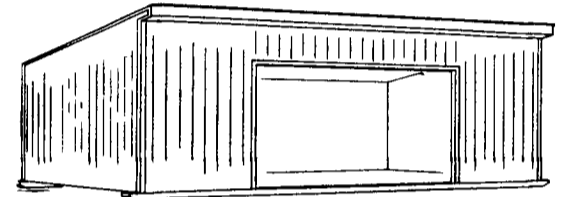


CALF CONDO

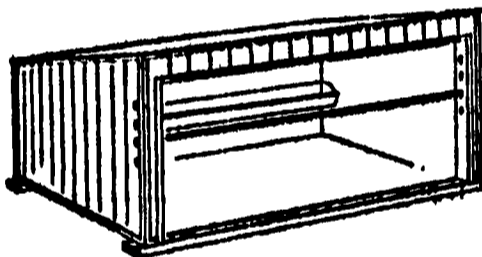
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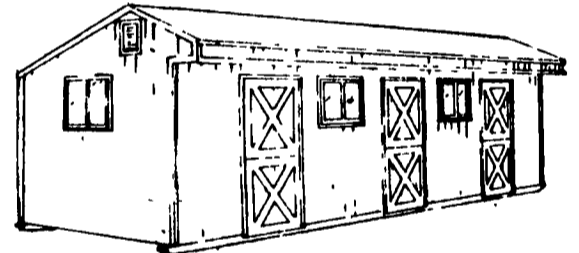
SHEEP SHELTER



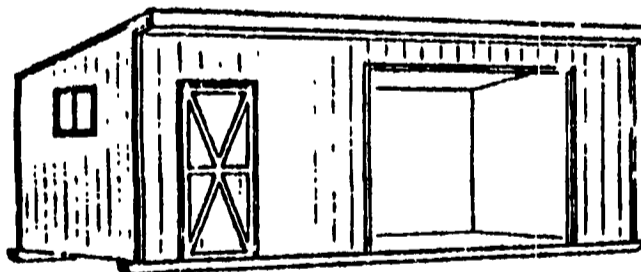
CATTLE SHELTER



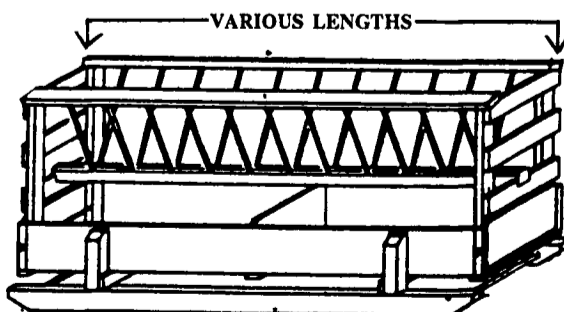
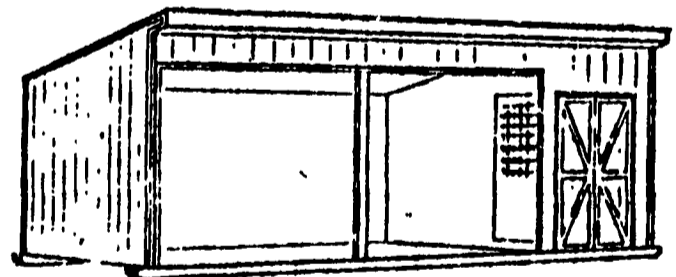
CALF CREEP FEEDER



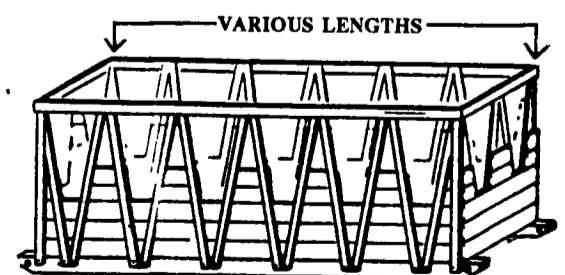
13'x32' HORSE BARN



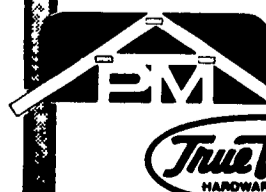
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