

# Heifer Comfort, Cleanliness Paves Way For Improved Production

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MOUNT AETNA (Berks Co.) — For Donald Landis, finding a new heifer barn was a matter of looking into a lot of things.

A combination of ideas "from here and there" were put together to create a work of dairy farming art.

The new heifer facility on Spring Breeze Dairy Farm is modified Virginia-style, without the short roof and the slight slope. When time came to construct it, he revised some of the original plans — instead of the 1-inch per foot requirement of most designs, Landis went to 2 inches. And Landis lengthened the roof to provide more shade in the summer and allow better heating for heifer warmth in the winter.

Altogether, the heifers are more comfortable — which may translate into better milking and more dairy profitability for the Berks

Co. dairy farmer.

### Several improvements

Landis has made several major improvements to his 222-acre Dairy of Distinction farm (in addition, Landis rents another 180 acres of land for cropping). He grows most of his own feed and, together with his son Tom, manages about 135 head of registered Holstein and 120 replacement heifers and calves.

Although the milking averages have not been up to par, according to Landis, (about 16,400 pounds for the herd), a combination of feed improvements and a total mixed rations system is slowing bringing it up to satisfactory levels.

A big change in the operation came last December, when the new heifer barn was completed.

"We kept looking around and we saw one with pits underneath them," said Landis. "The reason



Don Landis has made several major improvements to his 222-acre dairy farm (In addition, Landis rents another 180 acres of land for cropping) in Mount Aetna. He grows most of his own feed and, together with his son Tom, manages about 135 head of registered Holstein and 120 replacement heifers and calves.

for the high roof is that, in the winter, the sun will shine the whole way back there, and heat it up."

### Seven heifers to pen

In the summer, the roof overhangs enough to prevent sun from heating up the steel pens and concrete housing that went into the construction of the 285 foot long building. There are seven heifers to a pen — they are placed in the first pen at one day old and are rotated up the line until they are two years old. Then, they are moved to the main freestalls.

The slope of 2 inches per foot provides more of an angle for gravity and footwork to push the manure through slats, down eight feet. After the pit fills, a valve is opened and, in minutes, gravity pushes the manure into the huge manure pit outside. It takes only about 18 minutes until the manure is entirely emptied into the large pit.

The pit is eight feet deep, 12 feet wide, and runs the entire length of the facility. The pens allow more comfort and cleanliness for the heifers.

"Naturally, the more comfortable they are, the better they're going to do for you," he said.

### Other projects

Landis has completed several other projects to add to heifer comfort and efficiency. In addition to the installation of a circular milking parlor, about three years ago a heifer fan and sprinkler system



A combination of feed improvements and a total mixed rations system is slowing bringing the DHIA rolling herd average up to satisfactory levels for Don Landis, who tends to his calves.



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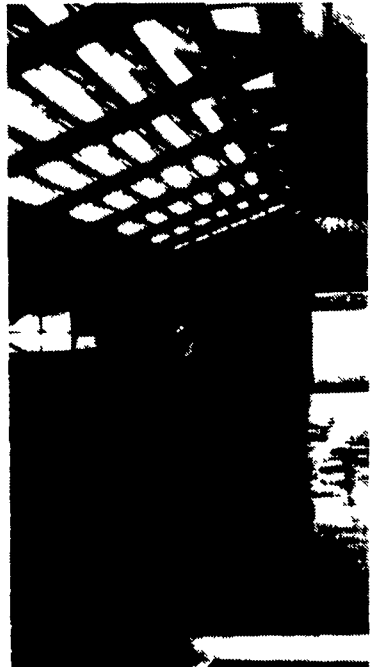
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were installed.

The barn itself provides a great deal of cooling for the heifers on hot summer days. But the sprinkling system can sprinkle about 60 heifers at a time on one side before water pressure is switched to the other side every five minutes. The fans run constantly.

Landis said that when the temperature outside is 40 degrees, to a heifer, it feels like it would to a person at 70 degrees. So if the outside temperature is 90 degrees, "why, you can imagine what the heifer feels like," he said. "So anything you can do to cool them off will make them more comfortable and hopefully produce more milk."

Landis also uses corn fodder for bedding. They chop the fodder in the fall, put it into a pile like silage, rake it, chop it with a forage harvester, put it in a pile, and cover it in plastic. Used fodder is then



The cooling system uses a combination of fans and a timed sprinkler system for cow comfort.

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