

Grube Farm: Study In Self-Reliance

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Co.) — Simple living is not easy living, but it's rewarding, according to Allen Grube, a Berks County dairyman.

Grube, his father Merlin, wife Mary, son Jay, 12, and Kenneth, 7, live on a 121-acre family farm tucked in the hilly farmland region of western Berks County.

They have a herd of grade Holssteins and milk about 48 cows, grow most of their own crops, and make a lot of their own equipment.

Some may question the wisdom in running an operation with grade animals — certainly the Grube's bossys would not make the cut for consideration in a large dairy show.

Allen readily admits that.

But he said his reason for having grade animals is not because he rejects the modern push for creating a herd of registered, show quality animals. Rather, he has focused his business on milk production. Simple, not easy, but efficient.

Somewhat shy about talking about himself, Allen is a study in self-reliance, independence and creativeness.

It's a study in self-reliance.

The Grube family farm is in an area resplendent with large trees, numerous small streams, winding roads. It's an area where the uninitiated can easily get lost while attempting to drive from town to town.

It's also an area where the school district doesn't offer vocational agriculture classes for students. It never did, Allen said.

Not having formal dairy training, Allen turned to his father, magazines, books and continues to attend Extension Service meetings and seminars to continue his education in dairying.

His achievements have not gone unnoticed.

Berks County Extension Agent Clyde Myers talks highly of Allen, noting that under Allen's care, the herd production has risen tremendously.

Currently, while not top of the county, Allen's grade herd averages around 22,000 pounds of milk. In April it was 22,990 pounds of milk with a 3.8 percent fat and 3.2 percent protein composition.

By itself, those rolling herd averages are respectable for any herd.

But consider that when Allen put the herd on test with the Dairy Herd Improvement Association in 1979 and got his first test results in



It's not a Dairy of Distinction, but it could be. The Grube farm and the activities of the family are a study in self-

reliance. Many of the buildings were built or renovated by Allen Grube and his father Merlin.

March 1980, his rolling herd average was 14,072 pounds of milk, 3.8 percent fat.

"About 1979, to 1980, we bought a few registered calves, five the first year. It didn't work. The grades do as good or better and I didn't have much luck with the registered cows," he said, indicating that they had health problems and accidents which required either selling them or destroying them.

"If I did get a good heifer, I would worry. With my luck, something would happen to it," he said.

Grade animals are productive for Grube. They work for Grube. If they don't work, they are gone.

It's the same way with a commercial horseback outfitter who takes people high into the mountains — the horses may not be top-of-the line, they might not be pretty, but they work.

Other horses, much more expensive can also do the job, but the investment and risk of loss is greater.

And so it is with Grube's grade herd. They work and they are appreciated.

And Grube works. And studies. He is a businessman, making decisions and making a profit.

In 1984 he put up a haylage silo. In October of 1985 he put in a mixer and got a nutritionist, Tim Kissling, and started feeding total mixed ration. The herd production began to soar after a couple of months.



Allen and Mary Grube say they didn't have far to go to find each other. The non-dairy farm where Mary spend part of her childhood can be seen from where the couple live now, adjacent to their fields.

The signs of independence and self-reliance are everywhere.

The farm itself is not on a "Dairy of Distinction" catalogue, but it could be. In fact, there isn't much to see that could be better.

Ventilation in the barn is great, with a large air duct having been built years ago, without anyone telling him to do it.

The calves are raised in pens that Grube made. The heifers are kept in a freestall facility that Gube and his father built. The gates Grube made himself, spending a winter cutting iron and welding. They will not twist or sag.

The headlock gates are almost all made by Grube, who copied some they purchased.

The automatic feeder for the heifers is a Grube creation — gas

engine-powered, with gears taken from a law mower, battery from an old car . . .

The barn is painted and decorated with hex signs that Allen and Mary made.

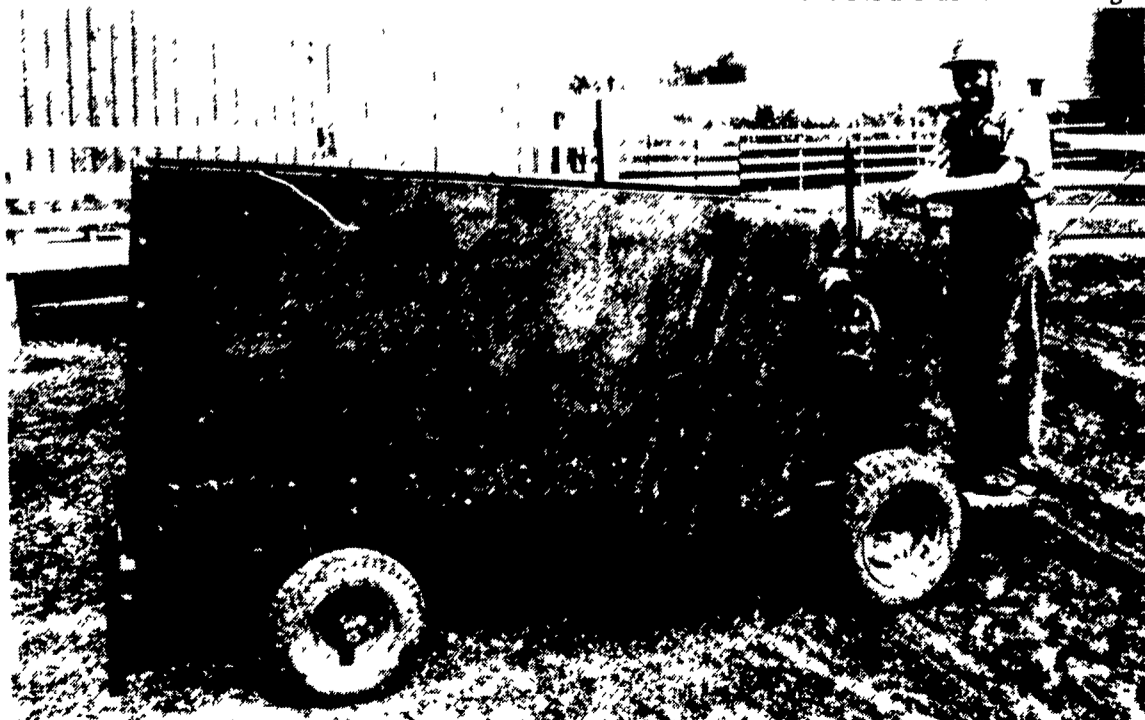
From across the street from the farmhouse, the layout of the dairy farm is balance and scenic — clothes drying on a line, family vegetable garden behind the

house — while the practicality of everything is solidly logical.

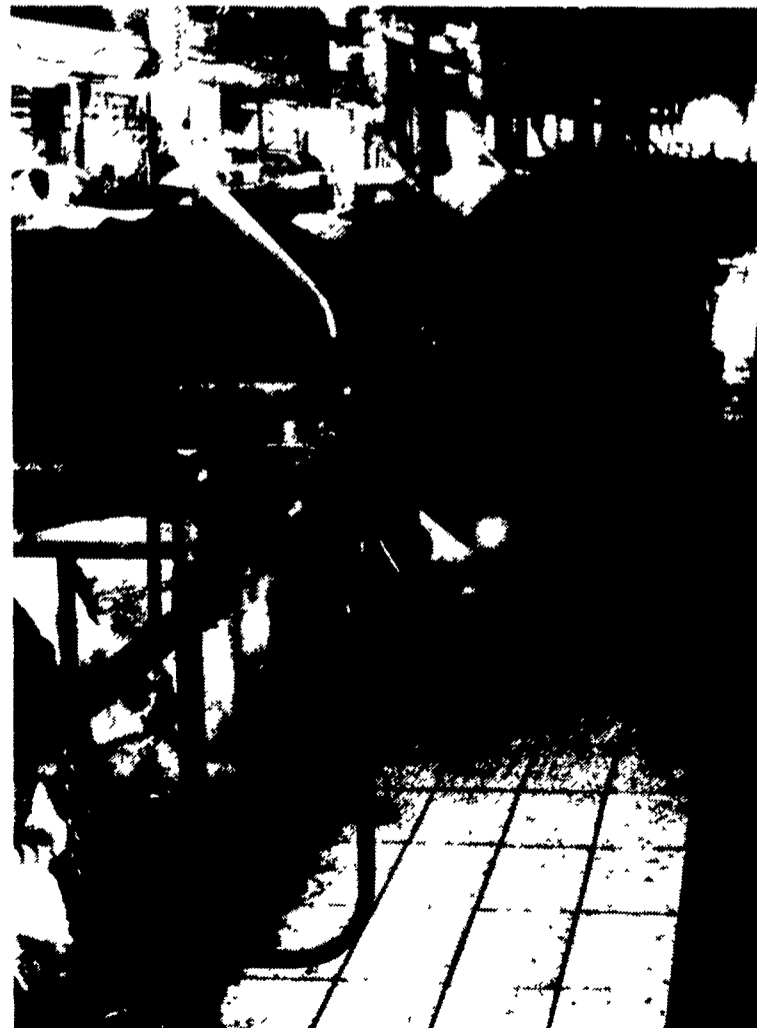
Often, people talk about farms where cattle of great breeding can be seen. Or, they talk about dairy operations so huge it boggles the mind how they began.

But people who know Grubes talk about how successful and pleasant he is.

And self-reliant.



Allen Grube is at the wheel of his creation — a gas powered automatic feeder. He said it cost him about \$800 to build.



A tiled manger presents a herd of grade cows with a clean plate for their total mixed ration.