

At Blessed Acres Little Things Are Important

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BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.) —

"I don't think we do anything special," offers this dairy farmer. Sometimes sticking to the basics reaps a better gain than special gimmicks. And a look beneath this farmers' modesty shows a solid, basic herd management philosophy — one that has earned G. Sheldon and Barbara Peachey of Belleville a second place award in the PaDHIA Herd Management Awards for production improvement. The Peachey's earned this award when, in one year, their herd average increased 3,226 pounds for milk, 120 pounds for fat, and 111 pounds for protein. Their 22,379 pound herd average is well above the state average of 18,181. The management of their 65-cow herd centers on nutrition.

"I feed a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) for 70 pounds and then, anything above 70, I give them high moisture shelled corn and concentrates (protein and minerals) in the barn," Sheldon explains.

Peachey's farm set-up enables Sheldon to give his cows even access to the haylage (35 pounds) /high moisture corn (20 pounds) /corn silage (20 pounds) /minerals mixture all day long in the freestall bunk. This mixture also includes 6 pounds of soybean meal, corn distillers, and roasted beans per cow. Then, when milking in the stanchion barn, each cow over 70 pounds earns an extra portion of shelled corn and concentrates.

But it didn't used to be that

way. "Five years ago, we put up the one Harvestore for shelled corn. The other one is for haylage. I wanted to get towards a TMR but I didn't want to get into more money then. And it seems the mixer is what it took to make all these things work". Because of his Farm Master tumbler mixer, Sheldon's herd feeds on the TMR whenever they choose. Before, he wasn't able to feed shelled corn or concentrates with the forage, causing a limited intake of grain. The mixer took care of these limitations.

But, just as important, Sheldon emphasizes high quality forage. By planting quality forages and by harvesting at the right time, Sheldon has attained an average of 20% protein, sometimes testing as high as 22%.

"I think there are a lot of ways to improve (milk production) without spending a lot of money. I'm not a guy to feed a lot of feed additives like fat. I'd rather get good forages in them. We try to get our haylage top grade," he explains.

Sheldon takes his forage philosophy one step further — saving feed costs. "I feed them to make milk. Forage is the cheapest way to make milk. It's a lot healthier for the cow, too."

Sheldon attributes this year's dramatic increase in milk, fat, and protein to good forage. "We had real good haylage last year. Feed prices were low and milk prices were good most of the year, so I fed them pretty good. The cows are peaking higher, the two-year-olds are doing a lot better".



Sheldon and Barbara Peachey of Belleville, along with their children (l-r) Christine, Marla, Laura, and Marcus, have proven that hard work pays off. Sheldon implemented a good forage and nutrition program which increased his herd average by 3,226 pounds, earning him second in the state for production improvement.



In the stanchion barn, Sheldon top dresses shelled corn and concentrates to cows over 70 lbs.



By studying individual cow statistics from DHIA, Sheldon Peachey makes sure each cow is earning to its fullest potential. By watching their father, Marcus (left) and Marla (right) are bound to pick up these good management techniques.



Laura and Marcus learn responsibilities on the farm much the way their parents did - by helping feed the calves and other livestock.

When not concentrating on nutrition, Sheldon and Barbara pay attention to other details that are important. "I take care of the little things. I don't watch the herd average. I make sure each cow is making me money."

Those other "little things" include monthly herd health checks, being there when the cows calve, and getting them bred back. He also feels using top bulls is important. "We haven't lost a heifer calf in 4 1/2 years," he states. And he only buys a cow if he sees potential for improvement. By milking cows with high Somatic Cell Count last, Peachey's have been doing a good job keeping mastitis down and keeping their SCC under 100,000.

But there are other "little things" that are important to Sheldon and Barbara — their children. Laura, 10, Marcus, 6, Maria, 5, and Christine, 2, take their share of responsibilities on the farm and at home just as Sheldon and Barbara were taught from their parents.

"The basics are still the same — hard work. You have to do things when you don't feel like it. Dad gave us a lot of responsibility and that helped when we went out on

our own," Sheldon said.

For these reasons, the Peachey's want to keep their operation family-sized. In spite of having a fulltime hired man, Sheldon feels more comfortable doing the work rather than managing a lot of employees.

But Sheldon's modesty should not overshadow his proven ability to manage their two farms, totaling 140 acres. The Peachey's take nothing for granted and realize they have a lot to be thankful for. Maybe that's why they named their farm "Blessed Acres".

Homestead Notes