

# Environmental Dairyman, Brown Swiss Fancier

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a.m. and 4:30 p.m. schedule to pay the bills.

The operation is simple to handle, yet sophisticated in concept. It's old looking, but modernly designed.

When he and Carol moved to the rural farm, it was not set up for dairying. It had been a steer and hog farm with a chicken house.

The chicken house has been renovated into a series of pens with headlocking gates which can be cleaned with a small front-end loader.

After the calves are raised to size in hutches, they are grouped together in the pens, which are outfitted with headlocking gates.

The bank barn, which Trimble said was probably built about the time that the 1814 stone house was built, was changed from three large pens to a U-shaped freestall barn. The floor of the barn is scraped and the manure stored in one of the first holding facilities built in the county.

In the mid-1970s, Trimble was one of the first to take advantage of cost-sharing to build the manure lagoon and terrace the sloping crop fields. His interest in environmental responsibility has not waned.

In fact, Trimble is involved in efforts to scrap the current proposed nutrient management legislation which would focus on all agricultural operations and would be enforced by the county conservation districts.

The group to which he belongs is the Family Farm Movement, initiated by neighbor Allen Weicksel. From the Trimble yard, Weicksel's farm is near one of the large, high-voltage electrical transmission line towers that course the western ridge near the Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station.

According to Trimble, the movement is not to discourage environmental responsibility, but to discourage bureaucratic "experts" who have singled out farming in the Susquehanna River watershed as the probable cause of the excessive nitrogen which flows into the Chesapeake Bay.

"I think it's a real issue for me. If you mess (the environment) up, it's gone forever. We try to go a good job with the environment and wildlife," he said.

Trimble said that farmers should know about what occurs on their farm and whether they are contributing to major degradation of an area and its watershed.

"I think farmers are more educated about the environment, than some of these people. It's his (the farmer's) livelihood. We live with it," he said.

He said that what is needed is education, not regulation.

However, he said he doesn't rule out the need for some regulation — as long as it isn't the state Department of Environmental Resources doing the enforcement, and as long as it is "farmer friendly."

"I think we are definitely going to need a (nutrient management) program somewhere down the line."

A quiet champion of taking care of agricultural land, Trimble would be difficult to argue with in light of his recognized stewardship and past practices. In 1976 he was the recipient of a conservation award for his work on the farm.

An avid hunter, he said he has a strong appreciation for the quality of life benefits obtained through an understanding and caring for the area in which he lives.

Also, he said he recognizes the financial benefits of conservation practices.

Trimble said that, since he went to storing the manure and using it when it was most opportune, he hasn't used any commercial fertilizer, except for lime, on his corn for more than a decade, perhaps longer.

The area is not typical Lancaster County, however. There is a lot of woodland which covers the lower slopes leading to the river. There are areas which protect waterways, though some do course short distances unprotected through pastures.

A quick check of Peters Creek last week (above the confluence of Puddle Duck Creek), which receives water drained from Donsdell Farm, revealed a wide diversity of aquatic insects which are associated with trout streams — mayflies, caddis flies, beetle larvae, etc.

Some sedimentation was evident in the tails of pools and sidewaters, but the main flow of the stream, and its clarity, seemed above normal for many lower-state Pennsylvania streams.

Watercress was growing in the sidewaters and bank conditions were better than average. There were numerous small fish dimpling the slow flowing pools.

However, it was apparent that some people have been driving along the unimproved Peters Creek Road and dumping along the banks of the stream such things as cat litter and yard refuse.

Not that it couldn't be farmers doing the roadside dumping, but it is unlikely.

Residential growth in the area isn't strongly evident, but it is growing, he said.

Trimble said he's been dairying all his life, having grown up in the southern Lancaster County region on his father's dairy farm with its Holstein herd.

He said his first association with Brown Swiss came as a youth, when he bought a Brown Swiss calf for a project animal. He does not own any Swiss related to that animal, but he said having that animal instilled an admiration for the breed.

A couple of years after graduating from school, he worked from 1965 to 1969 for the now-defunct Lee's Hill Farm in New Jersey.

It was a well-known farm, one of the oldest Brown Swiss operations at the time.

He said he picked up a lot of information there, such as how to artificially inseminate cows, which he continues to practice, instead of using an A.I. technician.

He also met his wife Carol while working at Lee's Hill Farm.

Her introduction to the dairy world was through him. Her agricultural background was her family's New Jersey retail flower business. After several years, she got used to cows, Donald said.

Trimble is recovering from hip replacement surgery he had recently at Lancaster General Hospital. He walks with a limp and sometimes a cane.

As an avid hunter, he said he will be ready for the fall grouse season when he and some friends plan to take to mountains in another part of the state for the arduous walking that is common with hunting grouse without a dog.

He also hunts deer and occasionally goes for groundhog, he said.

Currently, while recuperating, he has full-time help for milking.



Peters Creek drains the agricultural highlands along the east bank of the lower Susquehanna River. This rocky area is located a couple miles below Donsdell Farm and seems to show at best minimal affects from agriculture.



This renovated chicken house now serves as an older calf-raising facility at Donsdell Farm.

Nancy Ambler from Kirkwood, a 20- to 30-minute drive away, does the milking.

In the meantime, Trimble does what he can on the farm, taking care of crops, making repairs, and feeding.

His herd is not on test with the Dairy Herd Improvement Association and he doesn't try to market pedigree, though he has four Excellent Brown Swiss cows in the barn, all home-bred, and he occasionally sells calves.

He markets his milk in Federal Order 4 through Atlantic Dairy Cooperative and said his Swiss herd is averaging about 17,000 pounds of milk. His grade Holsteins are averaging around 21,500 pounds.

Those numbers are strong, but Trimble has been feeding a totally mixed ration for the past 12 years. Trimble also uses a nutritionist, raises his own forages and has protein tests done. He purchases some corn and feed supplements from the local mills and he is on a herd health program with a local veterinary outfit, with visits every two weeks.

He had tried a computer feeder and had previously split the herd into a high and low producing group, but discovered that he lost a lot of production when making the switch from high to low. Now all his milking cows get TMR.

The computer feeder system remains unused in the barn, and

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Standing in front of a stack of three round hay bales, Donald Trimble shows the size of the easily handled bales. He said he wouldn't switch back to square, now that he has these.