

Mainesburg Farmer Pastures For Profit

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MAINESBURG (Tioga Co.) —

Nobody can accuse Bill Chamberlain of not changing with the times. The Mainesburg farmer's herd pasturing program has done a complete turn around within the last five years.

Chamberlain used to pasture his herd after each milking, just long enough to get the stalls cleaned. Incorporating a new pasturing program in the spring of 1991, his registered Holstein herd now spends most of their time in the pasture from April 20 until December 1, with just enough time in the barn for milking. During the winter months they still go outside for an hour or two of exercise each day.

The results? His new method of pasturing has radically cut down on the need for stored feed.

"At one time my herd received stored feed 365 days a year," said Chamberlain. "Now the pastures are doing the (feeding) job as well, only cheaper."

His cows still get high moisture corn and protein supplements, as before. The difference is now is the grazing replaces the need for haylage.

Hay that was previously grown to feed his herd now can be stored for later use or sold — a comforting thought for a farmer in difficult times.

But his program does not hinge solely on increased pasture time. It's the way he pastures that makes

a difference. He turned a former hay field into an intense grazing system.

As with most farmers, his pastures once consisted only of land too steep or otherwise undesirable for planting.

One common problem with pasturing in a large area is the livestock can pick and choose their grazing spots. They will nibble the young tender shoots only to leave clumps of older, tougher forage untouched.

The result is an uneven field of limited use to both animals and farmer. Intensive grazing is the remedy.

"The head of Soil Conservation Service (SCS) office told me five years ago that someday I'd be using one of my best hay fields as pasture. At the time I said he was crazy."

So what changed Chamberlain's mind? The hay field's proximity to the barn. It was the most convenient field to put the new pasture program to work.

Behind his barn, Chamberlain divided 13 acres into one acre lots. The lots are separated by an electric fence of polywire. High tensile wire surrounds the perimeter of the lots.

"They (the cows) may get through the polywire and on to another lot," said Chamberlain, "but I know they are not going to get through the high tensile wire and on to my neighbors' land."

A lane runs up the middle of the lots, providing a passageway for



The pond is a new addition to the farm. Chamberlain has plans to use it as an irrigation source for his fields in the event future dry spells hinder crop growth.



Tioga County Agent Craig Williams, from the Penn State Cooperative Extension Office in Wellsboro, demonstrates how the nose pump can be beneficial to cows in pastures lacking conventional water sources.



The nose knows. This red and white Holstein belonging to Bill Chamberlain uses a nose pump to get a drink of water.

cows going to and from the barn or lot to lot.

Chamberlain puts 45 cows to an acre. Milkers are on the lot for two half days, and heifers and dry cows for two full days.

With limited space in each lot, cows have less of a choice for grazing, so grass doesn't get the chance to grow old and tough. Because the lots are used on a rotating basis, fresh growth is allowed to come on.

Each lot has a chart posted at its



Donna Broomfield from the Steuben County (N.Y.) Cooperative Extension Office happily receives a refreshing treat of ice cream from Tioga County Princess Suzanne Jackson.



Chamberlain (in floppy hat) consults with the crew working on the 1/2 horsepower pump attached to the new holding tank where a previous wet spot had been. Drain tile placed in the red shale soil help the water flow into the cement-walled tank.

gate to keep the grazing dates carefully recorded. This system of pasturing allows Chamberlain to use each acre to its maximum potential.

Caleb Williams, a farmer who works closely with the SCS and cooperative extension offices, agreed that the smaller grazing areas work better.

"The biggest problem with pasturing is the transfer of nutrients from the paddock to the barn. Obviously, the more time cows spend in the pasture, the more beneficial the symbiotic relationship of cows and pasture

becomes."

Sometimes an abundance of rain can hurry the lot's growth beyond the tender stage the cows prefer. If that happens, Chamberlain clips it down and a sickle bar mower.

Lack of rain has another effect. The drought last year caused Chamberlain to take his herd off the intense grazing the program for one month, supplementing their diet with the stored feed until the grass began growing again.

If dry weather persists during