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As herdsman, Steve said he uses the computer to keep records of heats, when a cow is expected to freshen, when she is scheduled to be dried off, etc.

And, he said he constantly updates the computer.

"I carry in my pocket a list of printouts" and update them throughout the day," Steve said. "I don't sit down (at the computer) for a long period of time."

Each brother is responsible for entering his own information into the computer system, but they share data, Steve said.

For example, Dale uses production records and other data entered by Steve to help formulate rations. Eventually, with Clair taking over the cropping duties, pesticide-applicator records could be eventually entered and kept on computer and backed up.

Other information may also eventually make its way onto the computer, if it isn't already there.

The new double-eight parlor has computerized production meters and automatic take-offs. While not as computerized as some systems, it currently provides the data the brothers need, and it takes one person about 1½ hours to do a milking, at 75 percent capacity.

Three milkings per day are still used.

Steve said that, for the parlor, a rapid release system may be a future modification, because the occasional slow cow or spooky heifer can and has caused delays in the single line cattle movement out of the parlor and through the return aisles.

The parlor is designed so that on each side of the parlor are narrower return aisles for cows whose milk is being held or needs special treatment. It also serves as a catch-aisle for those needing breeding.

The barn is a perfect example of modern designs.

The long rectangular freestall barn has a drive-through feeding aisle and a row of beds lining the two long walls.

Hersheys incorporated shredded rubber bedding in the stalls. The rubber is then covered by a tarp-like covering. It is used readily by the cows.

Steve said they used 300 pounds of shredded rubber per stall, though recommendations ranged

from 100 pounds to 200 pounds.

"Within 24 hours, only three cows were not laying in freestalls and those were trained with a week," Steve said.

Ventilation control is strong in the building. The long walls look unfinished — The spaced frame boarding of the walls is covered with a mesh for bird control.

On the outside of the barn walls, a long plastic curtain can be adjusted up or down via a cable system, and handcranks located inside the building.

The roof has an open peak to allow cow body heat and moisture to vent freely.

Suspended about two feet beneath the open space is a wide multi-track gutter which slopes from one end to the other. The typically straight-falling precipitation falls onto the gutter and is carried away.

Steve said driving rain and blowing snow can work around the gutter, but for the ventilation advantages, he said they could live with the occasional small amount of rain or snow coming in on the wide center feeding aisle.

The manure handling system is based on an off-center collecting area and gravity drain to a 12-foot by 87-foot round, poured-in-place concrete storage tank.

Alley scrapers are unique too. Running lengthwise in the barn in the center of the cow aisles, an inches-wide narrow slit has been cut into the grooved concrete to house a chain linkage belt, to which the scrapers are attached.

The belt alternately changes directions, and, because the scrapers are directionally collapsible, manure in the aisles is always moved toward the center collection pit.

From there the manure gravity feeds to the storage tank, located about 75 yards north of the freestall building.

The location of the manure storage takes into account not only relative height to the barn, but also prevailing winds, which carry any odors away from the building and the residence.

Back inside the freestall, there are also five 12-foot by 30-foot box stalls to use for maternity stalls and to isolate and care for sick cows.

The box stall design is such that three quarters of the area is bedded with sawdust, while the remainder is in reality an extension of the freestall alley, complete with alley scraper.

Other decisions by the Hersheys include buying a mixer and changing to feeding a totally mixed ration; using an independent nutritional consultant whose job it is to test forages and give advice; and using a prostaglandin heat-

synchronization program modeled after a program developed and tested by James Ferguson, a researcher at New Bolton Center of University of Pennsylvania.

While the changes may seem drastic — going from stanchion milking in a facility that was last improved 30 years ago to operating a modern freestall — Steve said that one of their main goals was to make the transition as smooth as possible for the cows.

"You keep hearing horror stories about when you make drastic changes," he said. "Basically our goal was to minimize the trauma of the change (for the cows and heifers)."

Other goals in the design was to build it so it leaves logical room for growth. Because of the offset alley scraper and manure collection design, and with purposefully sit-

ing the way they did, a second 150-freestall barn could easily be built.

A second building would also fit in well with the feeding and most likely with the parlor design.

The financing for the project was through Keystone Farm Credit ACA, which Steve said is a strict business.

"Part of the reason we went with them, was because they are so careful. We didn't want somebody just throwing money at us," he said, adding that it helped the brothers' confidence knowing that the agricultural lender was careful in assessing the risk.

The financing is where a lot of the environmental concerns came to a front. Steven said the lender "checked for inground fuel tanks and any other considerations

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New member of the Hershey brothers partnership, Clair, standing in the right foreground, waits for a line of eight Holsteins to leave the parlor. Clair's nephew Derek checks equipment, while Derek's father Dale Hershey stands at the back end of the parlor at the gate release.

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