

# Kroeck's Advice: Keep Up With The Change, Dollars Will Follow

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The 44'x324' free stall barn added last year holds 210 cows comfortably.

The milking parlor, currently under construction, is expected to be finished sometime this summer.

In the meantime, the cows are being rotated in three milking shifts from the free stall to the 84-stall stanchion.

"We could do the milking in two shifts, but it would get confusing because our cows are grouped according to their feed intake. To keep things simpler, we milk each group separately," Mike said.

The Kroecks feed their herd using a computerized ration balancing program which is updated on a monthly basis.

The four groups: fresh, high, medium, and dry, are fed a totally mixed ration (TMR) determined by their milk output. A minimum of three pounds of baled hay per cow is added to the mix last.

"We believe in utilizing what we have," said Karl who calcu-

lates the feed rations and determines the proportions of crops needed to meet their herd's feed requirements.

Growing all their own forage and grain, the Kroecks only purchase proteins and minerals that need to be added to the mix. To determine the mix, Karl also takes into consideration the levels of minerals such as potash, magnesium, and calcium in the feed.

"If they are not correct, you end up with a lot of cow problems," he said. "The purpose of the computerized mixed ration system is to put in various ingredients available, along with the costs, to get a balance that is the least costly. It may not necessarily be the best alternative to feed, but then you can add what you need to up the grade of protein."

Regarding the feeding system, Karl said, "There's no question of the benefits we've gained. The occurrence of twisted stomachs has been greatly reduced."

Working all types of ground, from rich, loamy river flats to clay

fields with poor drainage, the Kroecks plant 700 acres of corn, 200 of alfalfa, 300 of mixed forage, and 200 of wetter grasses.

One hundred acres are reserved for pasturing. Five hundred acres are rented because some of the land they own consists of woodlands and brush, or resides in the conservation reserve program.

The feed is stored in a variety of ways on the Kroeck farm.

First to be filled with corn silage and haylage are two bunker silos measuring 30'x121' and 55'x121'.

Karl explained the advantages of bunkers: "It's easier. You don't have to fight with silo unloaders. Besides, the weather's not always favorable to drying hay."

For this reason, they also have a 35,000 bushel grain storage and drying system. Other silos are a 16'x60' concrete and two Harvestores at 20'x30' and 20'x50'.

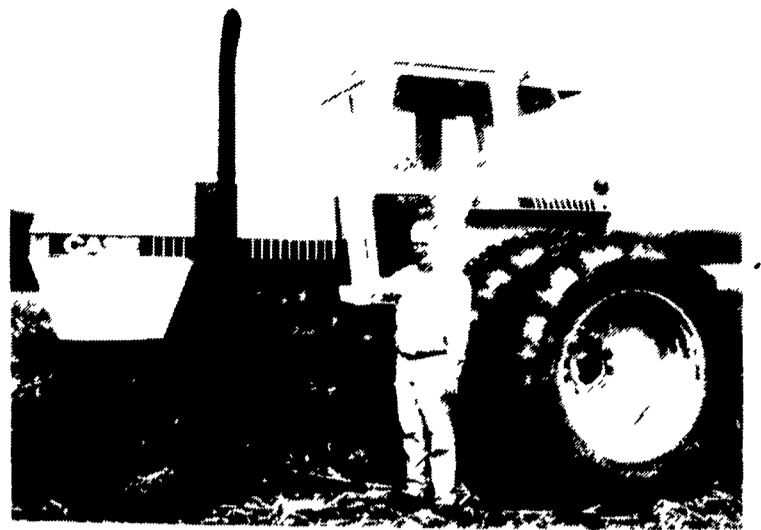
Goal setting is an important part of the Kroeck operation. When the new milking parlor is completed, they plan to increase their milking herd to 215, with a long range goal of 250 to 260 head.

"Theoretically," Karl said, "we should have 82 to 84 percent of our cows (total milking herd, including dry cows) milking." Pulling a credit-card size calculator from his pocket, he punched in some figures to reaffirm his statement.

Karl said, "Our goal is to keep the purchased feed costs at 15 percent of the milk payment. That's been tough to do these last couple of years, particularly with the uncooperative weather we've been having. But we're always optimistic."

With the addition of the free stall barn last year, the Kroecks added 100 heifers to their herd. Currently their herd average is 15,700 pounds of milk. They are now striving for 17,500. "We have a very young herd," he said.

Mike cites that as one of the problems that they will overcome with time. As the herd gets older, not only will their milk production



Getting to the fields before dawn, Karl Kroeck spends his entire day plowing, discing, and planting. Depending on the field's location and type of soil involved, Karl may employ different planting styles. On this particular knoll, Karl is no-till planting corn. Prior to planting, however, last year's corn still had to be picked because wet weather had prevented him from harvesting it earlier.

increase, but they will be easier to manage.

"Right now they require a lot of energy on our part as they are moved from the free stalls to the stanchions for milking."

The young cows have not grasped the total routine to the point of knowing exactly where they should go, so more time and hands are needed to guide them to and from the barns.

"Once the new parlor is operating, it should only take one person to milk, with another to help," said Mike.

Praising the free stall set-up, he said, "The cows are cleaner, healthier and happier; and the milk average has been on the rise ever since."

Breeding practices, too, are likely to change on the Kroeck farm. While they sometimes use a technician, Karl said they mostly scout the area for good registered bulls which are brought to the farm. Once the milking parlor is set up, the stanchion barn will be converted to a dry cow facility,

making it easier to use artificial breeding.

When Karl is not busy in the fields, he's serving the farming community as president of the Potter-Tioga Chapter of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, chairman of the Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Board, and as board member of the Tioga County Development Corporation, a volunteer group of county residents whose goals are to create employment opportunities, raise wage scales, and provide adequate housing, health care, transportation, and communication systems within the county. He's also a member of the Grange and the Pennsylvania Farmers Union.

To Karl, promoting the farmer and dairy products is as important as farming itself.

"One of the things we do at the Dairy Promotion Board is to try to sell more milk products, either as fluid or yogurt, whatever. A lot of the farmers don't believe that dairy promotion is doing them any

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## Md. Land Preservation

### Passes 100,000 Acres

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Robert L. Walker has announced that the state has just passed the 100,000-acre mark in purchasing the development rights easements on agricultural land in Maryland guaranteeing that this land will continue to remain in permanent agricultural use.

The state made easement offers covering 4,205 acres over the past two months which pushed the total to 102,738 acres under easement or with contract status. Overall, the Foundation currently has a total of 255,231 acres in the program.

"The Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation has done an outstanding job of keeping our farm preservation efforts going during the last few years of difficult budgetary times. I

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Mike Kroeck looks forward to the installation of the new milking parlor. Here he's busy milking one of the 160 Holsteins they run through the stanchion barn twice a day.

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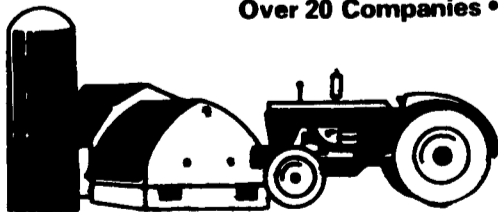
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