

Dairy Farmer's Objective Is To Improve Herd

GAIL STROCK

Mifflin Co. Correspondent

McVEYTOWN (Mifflin Co.)

— Take what you have and make it better. Whether it's crops, cows, or conservation, the challenge at CasStead Farm is to improve. And for Glenn Casner, it's a way of life.

"It's nice to watch something grow (crops) and to improve on what you're doing. The same with the cattle - to see how much you can improve them. It's a challenge," Casner said.

Casner probably inherited this outlook long before he bought the original 50-acre homestead from his father in 1961. And now, after adding four farms to his dairy operation and a lot more cows, Casner's objective has rubbed off on his two sons, Gregg and Doug.

The three Casner families formed a partnership in 1981 and have completed some major improvement projects.

The partnerships' goal to increase the milking herd from 140 to 175 brought about the desire to make milking faster and more comfortable. Just last year, Glenn, Gregg, and Doug decided to install a double-eight parallel parlor that allows two people to milk 80 cows in one hour, a comfortable and time-saving improvement from the 30-stall stanchion barn and changing cows four times.

Glenn Casner said they chose a parallel parlor because it took less space and could fit into an existing building. In the parlor, a large 8-foot by 16-foot door lifts like a garage door. Crowd gate buzzers urge the herd forward and eight cows enter the parlor on each side. Each cow entering the Kipe stalls makes a 90-degree turn, pressing on a bar which presses a paddle to the cow's side. This positions her back against the steel "wall" where the milkers hang.

Each person milking works with four cows on each side. Casners use Westfalia automatic take-off milkers and, as a result, have seen less mastitis because of over-milking. For warmth in the winter, infrared heaters positioned high



Glenn Casner of McVeytown, Mifflin County, stands near the Westfalia automatic take-off milkers. CasStead's mastitis rate has dropped because of the automatic take-offs.

above shoot heat straight down.

The partnership's conservation improvements earned them the Cooperator of the Year Award in 1987. CasStead's 420 acres (377 tillable) are located less than a mile from the Juniata River, and even though none of it borders the river, the Casners chose to participate in the Chesapeake Bay Programs.

They installed 1,232 feet of grass waterways which filter runoff and reshaped some stream banks. They allow cattle limited access to streams, and strip crop where they can.

"We think it's important to try to preserve the soil. You work all those years to build the soil up,

and storms come and the topsoil goes downstream. Strip farming has really aided us in saving the soil," Glenn said.

Another important thing the Casners want to keep out of the streams is manure. In 1989, they built a Groffdale prestressed concrete manure pit, 12 feet deep and 80 feet in diameter. The 586,000-gallon structure is emptied twice a year and Casstead and some rented ground utilize all of it. Glenn Casner said the manure pit is important for timing when

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Doug Casner shows how the Kipe stalls move when a cow enters their double eight parallel parlor.

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Gail Strock, Mifflin County's news correspondent, has been writing for *Lancaster Farming* for 3½ years.

Gail's published writing includes two "Made in PA" artist profiles in *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and a short article on local Appalachian dulcimer makers in *Common Ground*.

Hired by the Big Valley Area Business Association, Gail interviewed and wrote profiles for 17 artists and craftspersons for the promotional flier for Harvestfest, a yearly art, craft, and music festival in Reedsville. She also recently finished writing a tourism brochure for the Juniata/Mifflin Tourist Promotion Agency at the Chamber of Commerce in Lewistown.

Gail was graduated from Penn State with a degree in agricultural economics and rural sociology. She traveled throughout the United States and Alberta, Canada with her husband while he tested combines for Sperry-New Holland.

Residing in Belleville, Gail lives with her husband Dennis and sons Evan, 9, and Aaron, 5, on their 27-acre farm.

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