

Use Caution Converting To Beef Facility

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Dairy farmers who want to pursue Holstein beef production as a sideline should proceed with caution before renovating that old building on their farm to raise bull calves.

"Most people overestimate the value of an existing building and underestimate the cost of renovating it for an alternative use," said Dr. Robert Graves, professor of agricultural engineering in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "Evaluating a building comes down to asking lots of questions and answering them honestly."

An honest evaluation is especially important because animals are involved. "We shouldn't subject animals to poor conditions that exist in many converted buildings," Graves says. "You may think it will be easy to alter an existing building to raise bull calves, but inadequate remodeled facilities can quickly devour profits."

"Unfortunately, the long-term cost of lost animal productivity is almost never considered," Graves said. "You must be sure that the animals' basic needs — fresh air, adequate feed space, clean resting areas and frost-free water — can be met easily in your existing building."

Decide what your requirements are for raising animals before evaluating a building, Graves advised. "Once you know what your needs are in terms of space, ventilation and feed, and manure handling, you can begin."

The first thing to look at is the

building's location. "Where is it in relation to roads, property lines, wet areas and other buildings?" Graves said. "Will your neighbors complain about odors or noise? And what about local codes or ordinances that affect using the building for livestock?"

Adequate space and clearance are vital for any livestock facility. "Is there enough room for the number of animals you want?" Graves asked. "Will you be able to easily feed and observe your animals? What about manure disposal? Are the doors adequate and ceilings high enough to allow machinery access?"

Access to utilities such as electricity and water must be examined. "Frost-free water is a basic requirement for beef cattle," Graves said. "Breaking up floors and going through foundations to install water lines can be very expensive, and exposed lines always will be threatened by freezing." The building's structural soundness and maintenance requirements also must be carefully considered.

"Finally, ask yourself how much you'd pay for the building if you didn't own it," Graves said. "When you think about writing out a check to someone else, it's amazing how the list of things wrong with the building will grow."

When you've tallied the estimated renovation costs, compare the sum to the cost of a new facility. "If the projected cost of remodeling is more than two-thirds or three-fourths of a new facility, the new facility might be a better

option," Graves said. "Hidden costs can make renovating an old building more expensive than building a new one."

More information about evaluating existing farm buildings and other aspects of beef production can be found in "Holstein Beef Production," a proceedings containing 28 papers presented at the Holstein Beef Production National Symposium in Harrisburg in February. It is available for \$12 from your Penn State Cooperative Extension office.

Ice Cream Shouldn't Freeze Your Budget

Ice cream that costs \$2.00 a half gallon may please your family just as much as a kind costing \$3.00 or more. Trained dairy product evaluators in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences have found that most of the 250 samples of vanilla ice cream they evaluate each year are of high quality — no matter what their price.

"Some of the economy brands stack up well next to their more expensive counterparts," said Sidney E. Barnard, a Penn State professor of food science who supervises the judging. "Only about 10 percent of the samples have pronounced body or texture defects, such as weak, coarse or icy texture. The majority of the brands have good to excellent body and texture."

Each year Americans spend \$5.2 billion on an estimated 775

million gallons of ice cream, with the average price of a half gallon about \$2.50. While the majority of brands taste good, there are valid reasons why some cost more than others, said Barnard.

"Premium brands are composed of more expensive ingredients," he said. "Manufacturers must pass the cost on to consumers."

"For example, a premium brand of vanilla will have pure vanilla as an ingredient, while an economy brand will be flavored with artificial vanilla. Manufacturers pay only a few dollars for a gallon of artificial vanilla flavor, but they pay \$60 or more for a gallon of pure vanilla."


The least expensive brands also use fewer fruits and nuts, said Barnard. "If you open a half gallon of an economy brand and a premium brand, cut across the blocks on a diagonal, and compare them, you'll see the distribution of fruits and nuts varies greatly."

Economy brands also are com-

posed of more air. "There has to be some air in ice cream, otherwise it would be rock hard," said Barnard. "But premium products might have 20 percent air, whereas economy brands can have up to 50 percent." Barnard said that the smooth texture we look for in ice cream is the result of proper handling. When ice cream partially melts and refreezes, it forms ice crystals, which causes a coarse or icy texture.

Ice cream must be stored in a freezer set for 0 degrees Fahrenheit or below. The freezer must not have fluctuating temperatures. If not consumed within two weeks, hold the ice cream at minus 20 degree Fahrenheit or below to prevent an icy texture from forming.

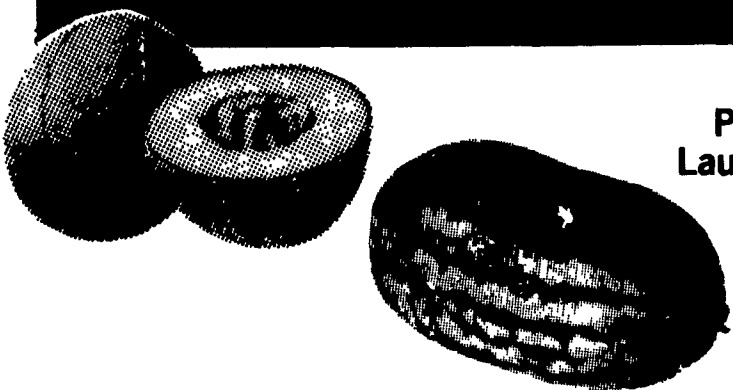
"No matter what consumers pay for a half gallon," said Barnard, "they can spoil the texture of the product by letting it sit too long in the car or on the counter before they return it to a freezer."



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