

# Sanner Farm Switches To No-Till, Intensive Grazing Finds Savings

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ROCKWOOD (Somerset Co.)  
— Lynn and Debbie Sanner have been farming for 17 of their 21 years of marriage.

Because they used available resources to their advantage, their Holstein dairy herd has grown to 95 head, including dry cows.

Heifers number 110. They started with 20.

Herd production is now 21,200 pounds of milk, compared to 13,000 pounds in the early days.

Fat percentage is now 3.6 and protein stays around 3.2 or 3.3 percent.

In 1992, Sanner, whose brother Keith shares the farming responsibilities, switched to the intensive grazing method and said recently that he is well-pleased with the results.

"Everything is going real well as far as herd health," he said.

Sanner said he enjoys learning ways to improve his operation and saving time and money in the process.

"The benefits I've seen are the savings in feed," he said. "We always put our cows out in the summer. When the cows start dropping in production, I start feeding the stored feed." He uses total mix ration.

When Lynn and Debbie took over the farm, around 1976, Sanner had made the choice to quit college after attending the West Virginia University at Morgantown for two years. Nobody else in the family wanted to run it, even though Sanner and his brothers were the fourth generation on the farm.

Lynn said his dad was into the coal business and the farming end was hanging on by a mere thread with Sanner's mother and brother keeping it going.

It was a gutsy move for the young couple who lived a mile away from the barn and had to drag the babies along at milking time. With them came the playpen, then the walker, which they tied fast with just enough leash to allow a satisfying mobility for the toddler.

Debbie did the feeding and Sanner's mother continued to help them.

Memories of those early days are vivid for Debbie. "When we took over," she said, "there were no silos, they didn't soil test or

spray. There were only the basics.

"We baled 20,000 bales of hay each year," then, grinning she added, "Lynn's grandfather taught me to unload a wagon real fast."

Today the Sanners put away just 2,000 small bales.

Together they worked hard. As the operation grew, and milk production increased, silos were added. There are now three of varying sizes for haylage, high-moisture corn and corn silage. No-till farming was begun 10 years ago.

The biggest silo was installed in 1989 for haylage. Its size is 25 by 80 feet. A 20-by 80-foot concrete silo was built around 1984.

The first silo, for high-moisture shell corn, was erected in 1979. It's 20 by 55 feet.

Sanner said he wouldn't go back to plowing, but said that no-till is not a complete panacea: "You still have to pick rocks."

Herd health is as much a concern as with any dairying.

His veterinarian makes monthly visits to check animals.

Consultants are important too.

Sanner credits much of his success to a close association with Bob Brown, the county agent. "I use Bob Brown... and A.J. Walker, two people who have the knowledge," he said. Walker operates a local farm service business.

Sanner said that through the years he has continued to educate himself by reading a lot, but a home computer is also a valuable tool in the operation's record-keeping.

"They sure are fascinating," he said. He added a computer in 1983 and said it greatly helped manage the farm.

Five years ago, their new house was built near the barn. And because she would rather work outdoors than inside, Debbie has planted big, beautiful flower beds all around the well-kept lawns.

Their house faces, across the lawns and driveways, the solid stone house of Sanner's parents, built in 1811. Recorded as one of the oldest in Somerset Co., the landmark house was constructed, it is said, by a Peter Bradford, whose own nearby log house was consumed by fire. Bradford, according to rumor, determined that his next house would not be easily destroyed.

Sanner and Debbie said they look with satisfaction upon their



Sitting on the porch step of their home, are three members of the Lynn Sanner family — from the left, daughter April, Lynn and his wife Debbie. Not shown are daughters Amy, Christy and Darci.

accomplishments. "It's all come from the cows," they said.

But their conversation reveals their desire to be as self-sufficient as possible in every way. They do much of their own butchering with Sanner curing and smoking hams from several hogs they raise. Home-grown produce from Debbie's vegetable garden is also preserved for the family.

A sawmill beyond the roadway appeared well used. Sanner said it belongs with the farm and is used for cutting wood from their own stand of timber when necessary. Of 500 acres, 275 are actually farmed. The remainder is woodlands.

In fact, Sanner said it was the farm's timber that supplied the lumber for both his and his brother's house. All of it was sawed on site.

Sanner said he plants 120 acres in corn, 90 in alfalfa and the remaining land in other grains and hay.

"My dad helps when he's around," said Sanner. "You really look forward to having him

around because he's an extra hand."

Debbie, who also operates a beauty shop, doesn't usually help on the farm anymore unless there's an emergency.

As it now stands, the four Sanner daughters — Amy, 20, Christy, 18, April, 16 and Darci, grade 7 — aren't showing the least inter-

est in entering ag-related work. But they are sports nuts who participate in basketball, volleyball, track and others.

Amy attends the University of Pittsburgh at Pittsburgh. Christy attends Shippensburg State College. April and Darci are students in the Rockwood school district.

## NDB Gives Kids Dental Tips

ARLINGTON, Va. — Snacking is a favorite pastime for everyone, especially kids. Knowing that, the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board developed a packet of materials with snack recipes that include dairy foods.

Many kids come home to an empty house after school, and even those that have a parent at home in the afternoon like to show their independence. So the recipes found in "Power Packed Dairy Snacks" are simple enough for kids to make with some supervision.

Along with the recipe leaflet, a brochure titled "Snacking and Your Child's Dental Health" was part of the packet of materials distributed to 740 supermarket chains for dairy merchandisers and consumer affairs specialists to order for distribution to their shoppers. The National Dairy Board joined the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) to develop that brochure.

"Snacking and Your Child's Dental Health" discusses the causes of tooth decay and ways to prevent it as well as the benefits of choosing nutritious snacks, including chocolate milk. This brochure also supports the chocolate

milk promotion being conducted this fall.

Each year, the National Dairy Board distributes two supermarket kits with free dairy information materials tailored to a certain subject. The "Power Packed Dairy Snacks" kit, also included offers for a cooking demonstration videotape, recipe card with two children-friendly recipes, food recipe and photo to use in other printed materials like a store circular and background information about snacking and nutrition. Supermarket personnel can order unlimited quantities to use in providing information to their customers.

"Because we (dairy farmers) care about kids' health and kids are current and future consumers, they remain an important market target," said Maynard Lang, Iowa dairy farmer and chair of the National Dairy Board's Public Relations Committee.

"Since the kits were mailed out in late August, we have filled orders for more than 800,000 recipe and dental brochures," Lang said. "That confirms consumer demand for information about and ways to use dairy foods, and that can lead to increased sales for America's dairy farmers."



These Holsteins line the fence of their pasture to observe a group of people walking a pasture to observe the cow operation.

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