

Grass Is In At Plum Bottom Farm

(Continued from Page A36)

Ayrshires was started in 1986 with the purchase of open heifers. Since Rodgers likes to use his avocation as an instructor for the Dale Carnegie course in his farm pursuits, the Ayrshire herd became the focus of promotional efforts. From nothing to the current DHIA year-end record of nearly 18,000 pounds of milk and nearly 700 pounds of fat, Rodgers has been promoting his herd. Consignments to state and national sales has been one method used. In addition, Plum Bottom had the grand champion Ayrshire at the 1993 State Farm Show and the reserve grand champion and the junior champion at the recent 1994 State Farm Show. Recently Atlantic Breeders purchased the January bull calf from Alfadale Gem Stone out of Plum Bottom Legends No (VG, 2Y). The granddam is the Madge's Bay daughter that made 4y 31,475m 3.7f 1121f in the Plum Bottom herd.

The dairy operation built around zero grazing carried into the present herd until 1990. But research now shows that rotational grazing is a more viable method to handle the dairy herd because of the present day high input costs. Once again Rodgers used the recommendations gathered from Penn State research for the basis of change. With three years experience on a rotational grazing program, the Plum Bottom dairy herd is living proof the system works.

Before the pasture system was adopted, production on 27.7 Ayrshire cows was 14,506m 482p 584f. In the current program with pasture, 38.2 cows averaged 17,239m 606p 674f. But the real story is in reduced inputs. Total feed cost per cow dropped from \$1152.00 to \$988.00. The feed cost/wt. milk went down from \$7.94 to \$5.73. The capacity needed for manure storage went down from 600,000 gallons to 400,000 gallons.

"The big difference is in inputs," Rodgers said. "We have a 60 hp tractor now. We did have a 120 hp tractor. And we got rid of a forage harvester and a number of forage wagons. To me, growing crops on



Plum Bottom Legends No is the VG 2-year-old dam of the January bull calf purchased by Atlantic Breeders. The next dam is the EX Madge's Boy daughter that made a 4-11y 31,000m record in the Plum Bottom herd.

the land is one thing, but now I need to do it at least cost. The grazing aspect as demonstrated to me has great potential."

The belief in this potential has even changed the career direction of son Jim. For eight years after college, Jim pursued his interest in professional baseball. The sports administration graduate program at Penn State introduced him to an internship with the Chicago White Sox. Later he managed a minor league affiliate of the Kansas City Royals in Appleton, WI, and by early 1993 he had moved to work for the Marlins expansion team in Florida.

"In our family we were taught, and my father emphasized, that you should get done what you want to get done," Jim said. "This attitude left me free to go into baseball, which I enjoyed. I wasn't good enough to play professionally, but I went about getting a master's degree and became a baseball coach. But in the back of my mind,

I always knew the farm was here. I am the ninth generation here, and I see a lot of merit in keeping the farm productive."

A big event happened in Jim's life in 1993. He became engaged and was married in November.

"When I got engaged, I began to realize that in baseball it was tough to put down roots. I knew I didn't want to live in Florida. So we made the decision to come back to the farm in Pennsylvania and start married life here.

"We considered many different enterprises that could be done here, but the more we investigated the possibilities of raising heifers the more we liked it. Our plans are to buy yearling heifers, breed them, and offer them for sale just before they freshen.

"We have our work cut out for us, but we believe the freestall barn, the acreage, and the commitment to intensive grazing has a lot of merit. The way our minds are directed we are very excited about

it."

Plans at Plum Bottom call for a 26 acre field out from the barn to be divided into acre pasture lots with permanent fence around the outside and electric fence to divide the center area into acre sections. Rodgers believes 120 heifers can be pastured together in the program by allowing the herd to graze one lot for only 24 hours at a time. More than three weeks will have passed before the heifer herd is back in the same pasture lot.

In spring the excess forage will be stockpiled for winter in the form of haylage and large round bales of hay.

"When I first came back, I didn't realize the farm would make such an impact on me," Jim said. "But as we worked through what can be done on this farm, I got charged up. It's like coming back to my roots. I really never thought of making this career change until I got back here and got my hands, my feet, and my back into working on the farm

again. Then it began to formulate, and with this heifer project, I think we have a sound financial plan. So everything came together."

In the fall, the dairy herd of Ayrshires, which is housed on a neighboring farm, will be sold at what the elder Rodgers calls an accomplishment sharing sale. This is all part of the plan to promote and merchandise the herd.

"I like dairy cows," John said. "I have had two Ayrshire herds and one Holstein herd. But I don't think a dairy cow is an end in itself. They are part of our effort to promote."

"When I started this herd of Ayrshires, part of my interest was merchandising and marketing. So we are going to sell 75 head and keep 15 or 20. Eight pairs will be sold with the buyer to take choice. However, five older cows and five younger heifers will be kept. We will have a much smaller herd then, but Charles Pent from Connecticut is coming to run the dairy and will bring his small herd of Ayrshires along to join our smaller herd."

Rodgers sees his participation in both the state and national forage and grassland councils as part of his efforts to obtain information, meet people, and give back to others some of the things he has received. He is a charter member of the Pennsylvania group and is a past president. When he started to attend national council meetings, only university and industry people were represented on the board of directors. Through input from Rodgers, that has not changed, and producers are represented in equal numbers with the other two segments of the council.

As it happens, Rodgers is the first producer president of the National Forage and Grassland Council in the year when the council celebrates its 50th anniversary. This happens at the Host Resort east of Lancaster on Route 30 beginning Sunday evening through Wednesday night.

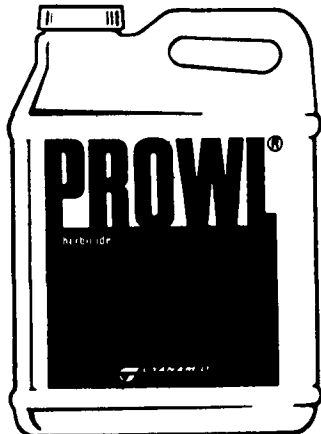
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