

Pasture Field Walks Offers Informal, Indepth View

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — About 40 people interested in dairy pasturing Thursday attended the first of a series of dairy pasture walks in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Held at the Lancaster city-edge farm of Harold and Doris Fritz, whose son Jack is in charge of the pasturing operation, participants got a look at the effects of a conversion farm, in which the Fritz's herd of Holsteins was switched to pasturing last year.

Walking through fields which had previously been used for traditionally harvested grain and forage crops, the Fritzes, Jack and brother Tim, who is a Penn State Extension agent, discussed the different mixes of legumes, grasses and in some cases Puna chicory that the no-longer tilled fields were sowed to.

Fritz's have 135 cows to 140 cows produce an average of about 23,000 pounds of milk and didn't drop production when going on pasturing last year.

The cows are also fed a totally mixed ration, while in the barn

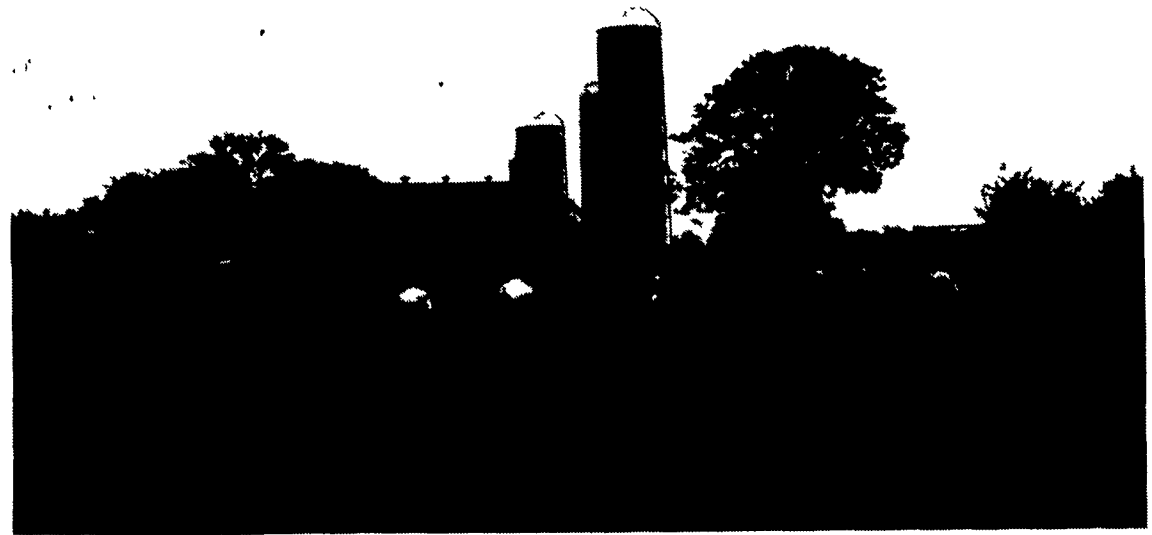
where they are milked in 35 tie stalls. But the Fritzes, especially Jack, commented on the increased ability to detect heats, the improved cleanliness of the cows, the ability to control cattle traffic with "spider" electric fencing and spools (a type of fencing system that provides easily movable, and durable fencing), and the apparent preferences of the cows.

The Fritzes don't need to spread manure, since the cows are pastured, and the rest from the barns is composted. However, they did talk about the impact of manure in pastures and the influence it has in causing cows to reject areas of feed.

According to the Fritzes, a large part of the pasturing system is timing — getting the proper number of cattle in the proper sized area when the pasture is ready, not too early, but definitely not too late in the plants' development.

Basically, the mixes the Fritz's use constitute a "salad" of forage, with each field sown slightly different as they test the growth and compatibility of different plants in the same fields.

They use a nutritionist and vet-



This group of people are participating in a pasture field walk at the Fritz dairy farm in Lancaster. There are in fields that had previously been traditional harvest crop and grain fields, converted to grass and legume mixed plants.

erinarian in their operation and the nutritionist, Tom Nauman, said that they have been testing the pastures for nutritional content by taking representative samples prior to grazing, and they have found protein content to be close to 25 percent.

While that can be considered to be a somewhat high level of protein and was cause for some concern because the veterinarian thought the risk of developing reproductive problems might occur, the Fritz's said that they have not experience such a thing.

The 12 pastures are a mix of old pasture and former crop fields. The lack of apparent organic matter in the soil indicated converted crop fields and the Fritzes explained that they expect that in a few years, when populations of soil microbes and worms can be built to natural levels or more, they would get better benefit from the pasturing system, and have faster breakdown of manure in the fields.

They noted that manure in the converted crop fields lasted longer and seemed to cause more rejection problems than in the old pastures, where soil microbes and worm populations were normal.

Despite some morning rain and a constant drizzle, the group spent several hours with the Fritz's and not only asked questions, but also provided their own insight into finer points of pasturing techniques and management.

Seeding rates, successes with establishing certain grass species, along with sharing numerous observations about how well certain techniques converted from theory to practice were among the topics discussed during the walks.

But the Fritz's pasture walk was only one of three scheduled for the southeast.

Sponsored by the extension service and with the help of host farms, Tim Fritz designed the educational series as an one-day-per-month activity.

The next pasture walk is scheduled for June 16 at the Lee and Gail Reinford farm in Montgomery County, where Tim Fritz is an extension agent.

According to a flier on the walks, the Reinforde milk 85 head and have been pasturing for the past three years. To get to the farm from Schwenksville, follow Rt. 73 east for about 1.5 miles, turn left onto Cross Road. Follow along Cross Road for about a tenth of a mile, and turn left onto Garges Road. The farm is on top of the hill, on the right hand side of the road.

The last one of the summer through this program is scheduled to be held at the Nevin Mast farm in Berks County on July 21.

The Masts have been pasturing



Holding the microphone, Jack Fritz smiles while explaining to a group of people interested in pasturing techniques employed at his farm.



These cows are part of the 135 Holsteins the Fritz family milks and feeds using pasture and TMR. Cleanliness of the animals, reduced exposure to poor environmental conditions and the apparent eagerness of the animals to eat prime fresh forage has been the cause of enthusiasm for the technique for the Fritzes. However, they say that pasturing does require more attention to detail and a broader based knowledge of plants and animals.

for the past four years and have 50 cows with 25 acres permanent pasture, with another 10 acres available for summer use.

The Masts planted brassicas in December last year on 20 acres.

To get to their farm from Oley, take Rt. 662 south from Rt. 73. After about two miles, turn left

onto Oley Turnpike Road. Go to the end of the road and make a left. The Mast farm is the second one on the left. There is a church across the road from the farm.

For more information, call Tim Fritz at the Montgomery County office at (610) 489-4315, or contact a local extension agent.

make it milk



This water wagon serves as the portable water source in the pasturing strategy at the Fritz farm in Lancaster. Jack Fritz says that using a portable system is best because it doesn't create environmental health risk areas in pastures, as permanent water sites do. They also said that after fencing off a stream and giving the cows only water they know is clean has lead to an increase in health among the herd. Many diseases, including Johne's can be transmitted via natural, unprotected and untested water sources. The Fritzes said safe, dependable natural water for cattle is a scarce commodity, and they eliminate many risks using the portable system from a known water supply.



This is what the cows in pasture drink from at the Fritz farm. A 35-gallon portable waterer has a float valve and is attached via water hose to a larger portable reservoir of water.