

# Greater Profitability

(Continued from Page A26)

time with the family. He worried that dairying "may be a good living, but not a good life."

So they switched to grazing. They installed a new fence. They put in a new water system, paddocks, and other refinements. Corn ground was converted to pasture. They reseeded cropland with fescue and put in alfalfa-orchard grass mixes, making use of some matua-clover-ryegrass combinations.

The land presented a "real opportunity" to graze no-till alfalfa.

The Pattersons installed additional fencing. After a while, cow cull rate was reduced significantly. Overall health showed significant improvement. Costs went down as a result of the switch to a low-production, low-cost system.

And the savings translated quickly into net profit.

Patterson reviewed the financial figures on his farm, dated from December 1989 to December 1994 (reprinted this issue of *Lancaster Farming*). It was clear: net income per cow went from \$921.49 in 1989 with 61 cows to a net income per cow of \$1,290.36 in 1994 with 91 cows.

In the end, for every dollar obtained per cow, half of that was used as family income. That net income Patterson attributes to the grazing program.

Patterson explained that too often, farmers set up the dairy in order to produce milk to obtain profit. Instead, he said, you should set the farm up for profit and allow milk to bring that profit.

Producers can then keep as many cows as they can. "Let the cows do the work for you," he said.

The cows, as a result of grazing, are cleaner and drier. He spends less time milking now with 91 cows than he did with the 60-cow herd. It is much less expensive to graze than to grow or purchase feed and feed supplements.

"It is absolutely imperative," said Patterson, "that we learn to be low-cost producers and absolutely imperative that we use grazing to do that."

To further that end, Patterson noted the upcoming Mid-Atlantic Dairy Grazing Field Day scheduled Tuesday and Wednesday, July 11-12, at the Delta Springs Farms in Mt. Solon, Va. and at his farm in Crimora, Va. Examples of grazing, including watering systems, nutritional considerations,

cost-share programs, forage varieties, etc. will be discussed.

After addressing the group, Logansport, Ind. dairyman Dave Forgey showed slides of what his farm was like before he switched to seasonal grass dairying. The area around the farm was worn down. Tilled areas surrounded it. Soil was being lost. The area didn't look real clean.

But then he showed those who attended the grazing conference a picture of his farm after he switched to seasonal grazing. Lush, green farm fields. A cleaner, healthier environment for the cows.

The crowd was impressed. Forgey, columnist for Hoard's Dairyman, switched to seasonal dairying (moving the calving season to fall) over a course of three years. The Forgeys reduced the herd size from 150 to 120. Some of the challenges Forgey faced: becoming more intense about conception rates, selecting bulls for high conception rates, and letting some good livestock go.

The farm also made use of check sheets and electronic heat detection.

But the results, when all other factors were in place, was lower feed costs, optimum use of materials, less equipment costs, and the herd benefited immediately in terms of overall health.

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, February 11, 1995-A27

The December DHIA report for the River-View Farm herd was 20,032 pounds, using the alfalfa/grass grazing.

Forgey reviewed the entire farm system, making use of an intensive rotational grazing system using 85 paddocks measuring 2½ to 5 acres each. Included is a simple water supply, with more than three miles of water line feeding separate, transportable 100-gallon tanks. The cows are moved every 12 hours from paddock to paddock.

The cows are kept on pasture all year-round, said Forgey. Silage is fed to them on pasture ground with a round bale system even in the middle of winter. He told the group that in the harsh winter last year, there were 10 days in a row that the temperature outside was 30 degrees below zero, with an 80 degrees below zero wind chill, and the cows were outside.

Net income per cow is more than \$800.

In a question and answer session that followed, Forgey emphasized the importance of selecting a plant species that works well with your soil types. For good soil in his system, he uses an alfalfa/orchardgrass mixture. On clay soil, he uses brome grass/red clover.

Every paddock gets hayed at

least once in the spring and is mowed at least once during the year.

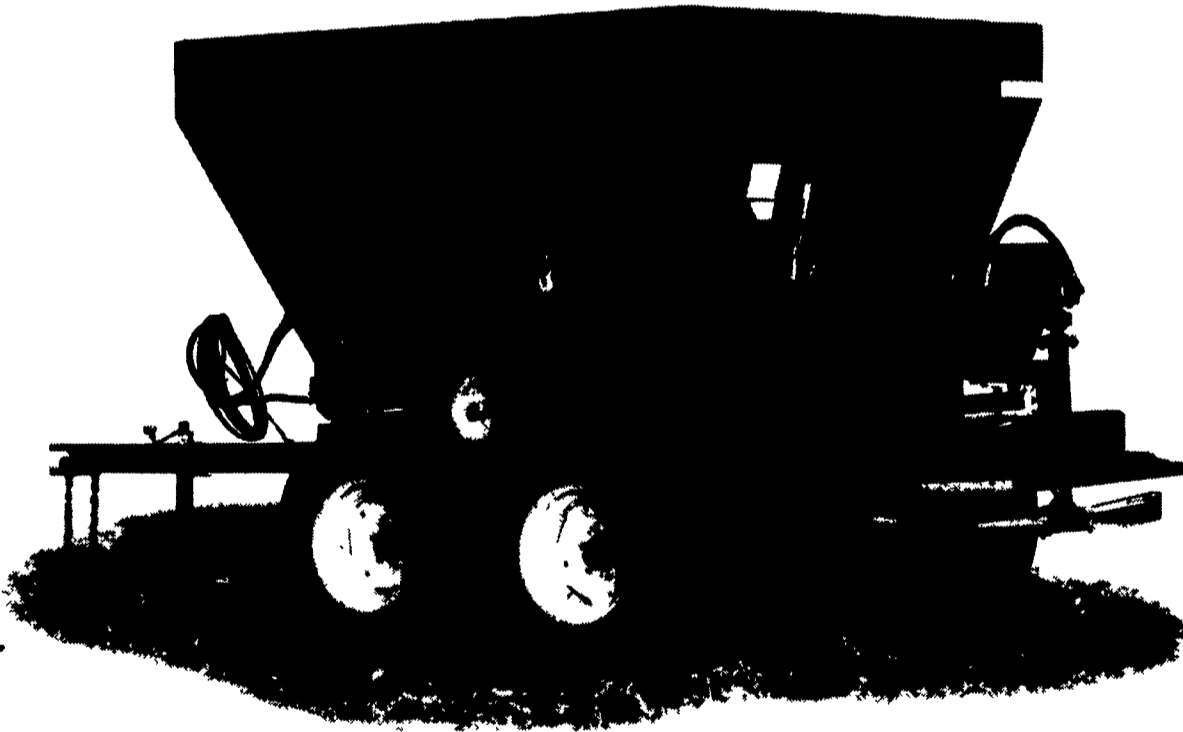
Joel Salatin, Staunton, Va. grazer who operates Polyface Tree Farms, emphasized the importance of "poly," or many-, rather than "mono," or single-culture farms. He said that through a combination of "generic" equipment that does multiple tasks, and watching costs, he has worked out a system that is healthy for the environment and farm-profitable.

Also, he emphasized that animals "should do the work. Don't think that every problem has a heavy-metal, diesel-fuel answer" on the farm.

Dr. Dave Zartman, professor at Ohio State University, spoke about the results of five years of research done on seasonal dairying. Research indicated that something on the order of 15-20 percent additional profit can be made if growers switch to seasonal dairying, and a similar amount using management-intensive grazing, he told those who attended the conference.

But the main message, he said, is that "seasonal dairying has enormous flexibility. It is not locked to grazing." Seasonal dairying works in many different variations. Zartman told the farmers to "give serious thought to seasonality" even if working with a confinement system.

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