

He Farms, She Teaches Ag

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A spring-fed pond with bass, bluegills, and waterfowl is located in a partially wooded glen off the side of the farm lane.

The pasture stretches from the barn down around tilled fields and along the flood plain of the stream. With a mature treeline and groves along the stream, the landscape almost seems unchanged from pre-urban sprawl.

The farm is most notable for using intensive grazing and three-times daily milking as a way to become more profitable.

The Williams began intensive grazing four years ago. The 66 milking cows and 56 heifers are in the pasture day and night from the beginning of April until after Thanksgiving.

"I'd recommend it to anybody," David said. "One of the things I like best about it is not needing to run that gutter cleaner every day. Our electric bill drops \$100 a month when the cows are out."

The 50-acre grazing pasture is managed. Soil tests are taken. The pasture is fertilized and limed.

"We pay as much attention to pasture as we do to raising other crops. We don't just open the gate and let the cows wander around," David said.

The herd is limited to a grazing area of one-fourth to one-half acre paddocks. If the summer is dry, a bigger area is used.

"Otherwise, it would be like serving Thanksgiving turkey where everyone picks out what he likes and lets the rest set. When you limit the area, the herd eats it clean," David said.

David continues to feed total mixed rations for grain intake, but,

he said, "I'd like to cut out all grains and feed straight grasses, but I hesitate to take the chance because I have fixed monthly expenses."

The Williams are often questioned about intensive grazing, but find many farmers are wary of making changes.

"They argue that I have natural pasture, but I tell them, you don't have corn fields in the spring. You make them. It's the same with pasture. We had a 12-acre section that had been installed with tile and drainage that we turned back into pasture."

"Although grazing isn't for everyone, it fits the situation. Some farmers have those big silos they want to keep using."

The Williams have two silos. Since switching to intensive grazing, one silo is no longer used.

"I can't feed enough off it keep it from spoiling," David said. Plastic wrap is used for round hay bales.

A full-time hired woman helps with the milking. She milks morning and afternoon. David takes care of the night milking in the tie-stall barn.

"We started milking three times a day on January 2. I like it, but it's a lot of labor," David said.

The herd's average is 26,800 pounds milk with 846 pounds protein, and 895 pounds butterfat.

The herd is mixed, but the Williams are working toward registration by identifying grades to register after three generations.

"It takes extra work, but I'm learning to keep a loaded camera at all times and snap a photo before letting the calves out of their hutches," Christine said.



David, Christine, Erin, Lauren, and Matthew enjoy the nature surrounding the spring-fed pond. The expanse of grazing land in the background had at one time been tilled and drained for traditional crop production. The Williams reverted it to a managed pasture.

Christine also feeds the calves kept in the hutches and bank barn.

Last year, the Williams installed cow mattresses.

"It's wonderful for cow comfort," Christine said. "The cows lay down fast after milking and it is easier on first calf heifers."

In fact, since installing the mattresses the Williams haven't lost any 2-year-olds and haven't had any problem with stepped on teats. The cows' knees and hocks do not swell.

David said that he has strong feelings about low milk prices.

"I got more for milk when I started farming than I do now. Everyone else gets pay raises but the farmer needs to get more efficient."

"It doesn't do any good to complain to neighbors or fellow dairy farmers, but I haven't found the right person yet to complain to," David said of his frustration in dealing with spiraling costs and lower prices.

But the couple strives to not waste energy debating unfair prices and concentrate instead on using available technology to

make the farm more profitable.

David was not raised on a farm. His love affair with farming began in his high school years when he worked on his uncle's dairy farm.

He and Christine became acquainted through 4-H and Grange activities. She graduated from Penn State and taught for several years before the couple married.

By this time, David had purchased his own herd of dairy cows and rented a farm. In 1987, the couple purchased their present farm.

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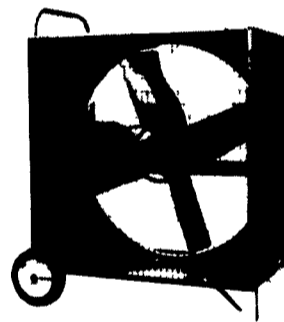


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