

Top In State

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product he wants, he hits the road with his feed truck and picks up the product. Frequent trips are made to Geneva, N.Y. and Clarkstown, Pa. for the ingredients that make up his ration. He also buys some ingredients locally and grows 100 acres of corn and many acres of mostly grass hay on their 450 tillable acres. The remaining land is used as pasture.

"I buy almost where the feed mills buy. All you have to do is show up with a truck and a good check and they're ready to sell it to you for the same money," Van Blarcom said.

To store the commodities, he put in extra feed bins and converted part of the top of the barn to dump bins.

"I can take trailer loads of four different ingredients at a time," he said. "I don't always get trailer loads. You just get too much inventory for this many cows."

The soybean meal, shelled corn, and roasted beans are dispensed

with the help of timed augers. All other ingredients are run across the scales.

The setup was mostly Van Blarcom's design. However, he did look at some other setups and worked closely with his nutritionist, Glen Kinsman.

"We used to do three mixes," said Van Blarcom. "A low mix, high mix, and a middle mix. Then we went to just one mix and topdressed, and now we're down to just one mix with no topdress. If I get some poor quality forage, I may go back to topdressing, but right now we're feeding better forage, so I don't need that much grain."

"The way to make money in the dairy industry is good forage. They've been saying that for years, but it's still true. We make money when we have our best forages, high quality haylage, and good corn silage."

The Van Blarcoms do grow some alfalfa, but are finding more and more that they can get the same milk production with good grass hay.

"We grow some alfalfa, but I'm

realizing that with the dollars you have to work with, you can't do it all. We lose it too quickly." He said. "I plant alfalfa in the fields we can keep alfalfa on and the others I leave in grass. My dad was doing that when I started, and it took me almost 15 years to get back to doing a lot of the same things that he had learned."

Van Blarcom is also getting back into pasturing the animals more, especially the dry cows and heifers.

"I rotate the pastures, but not intensively. I break it down into 4-5 acre chunks," said Van Blarcom. "The milking cows have TMR in front of them all the time they're in the barn and hay in front of them when they're outside. All the dry cows and heifers that are old enough are rotationally grazed."

The decision to switch to three times a day milking came in the fall of 1989, again, as a way to increase revenue.

"The price of milk was up quite a bit and 10 percent increase in milk production was going to make quite a difference," he said.

Milking times are 6 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 9:30 p.m. Van Blarcom and his wife typically take the morning and afternoon milkings while two hired hands trade off with the late milking.

"Three times a day is all right if you don't have to do it yourself," said Van Blarcom. "I wouldn't do it very many days if somebody called me up at 9 o'clock at night and said, 'Oh, I can't make it' — a couple of days like that and I'm back on twice a day."

Three milkings per day seems to

work out well for the family.

"We have to ship a lot of milk all the time to pay our bills. We've got a lot of acreage. We've over invested in real estate and we're farming (ground) that we don't have a choice about."

He realizes, however, that their setup is not for everyone.

"If you're going to go down there and milk them three times a day, you might as well make sure it's worthwhile putting the milkers on them," he said. "If you're going

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Donna Van Blarcom takes a break by a few cows before the afternoon milking. The family milks three times a day and boasts a herd average of 29,490 pounds of milk, 940 pounds of fat, and 909 pounds of protein.

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