

## THE BUSINESS SIDE OF GRADING



### FEEDING THE DAIRY HERD

In order for the cows to do their best, they need lots of a high quality, balanced ration. Let's consider what this statement means in three separate parts.

"Lots of" means the cows always have feed in front of them, whether it is on pasture or in the barn. If the pasture has nothing but stubble left, and we decide they have to clean that up before we move them to another paddock, then they do not have "lots of" feed. When it got so dry this summer, our six acres of pasture weren't growing much, so unless we took feed out to the cows, they spent much of the time without "lots of" feed. The same is true if the cows are in the barn, and we don't want to clean troughs out that still have feed in them.

As a rule of thumb, we like to have between 5% and 10% feed left over. In other words, we feed 40 lbs. silage, 15 lbs. haylage, 7 lbs. hay, and 30 lbs. grain or a total of 92 lbs. for 10 cows, or an average of 9.2 lbs. (between 5 and 10 lbs.) per cow. That may seem like a lot of work and feed, but if there is less than that, there are times when some of the cows have almost nothing in front of them, so they don't eat as much as they need for maximum production. Have you ever walked into a dairy that is averaging over 20,000 lbs. of milk (65 lbs. a day) and seen a lot of empty feed troughs?

When we talk about "high quality" feed, does that mean pasture stubble? Does it mean hay that was mowed late? Does it mean rained-on or moldy hay? Definitely not. "High quality" feed is feed that tastes good to the cows, such as lush pasture, early cut hay, or good corn silage. It also doesn't just fill up the cow's rumen without providing any nutrients the cows need in their diets.

"Balanced ration" means having enough protein, energy, fiber, vitamins and minerals in the right

proportion to meet the cows' basic needs. Having too much or too little of any of these ingredients in the ration will keep the cows from producing as much milk as they could and will sometimes cause health problems.

For example, simply giving a high producing cow more grain to get her production up even higher will backfire if it throws the ration out of balance. Often what happens when farmers feed too much grain is the energy level goes up, and if it's not in the right proportion with the protein and fiber levels, the cow will get acidosis or ketosis and her production goes down. Also some of the grain just passes through the cow undigested. So not only is the farmer spending more money for feed, he is also losing money on shipping less milk.

Thus, giving the dairy herd lots of a high quality, balanced ration means having nutritious, tasty, and correctly proportioned feed in front of the cows at all times. It may seem like more work and expense, but it will mean more profit in the long run.

We invite readers to send their comments and questions to us through the Lancaster Farming office. We are writing this column in the hope that we all can learn from each other by exchanging ideas and experiences openly.

Here is a letter we received, followed by our response:

"I would suggest to the editor to get more information in your paper about grazing. I have been down both roads, grazing and conventional dairying, and I can't understand how people can be so blind. Many still think this grazing is a joke. It's by a long shot no joke. Five years of grazing, and I can easily see that grass is better for the cows and the pocketbook.

But what do you feed in the

winter, people say. Hay, grain and corn silage is hard on the cows' health. [The column writer] mentioned forage planning for the coming year and that his feed man said it's cheaper to feed corn silage than hay at \$110 per ton and soybean meal at \$220. I'm afraid this feed man wants to sell his feed. I think if farmers would not ask their feed man so much, many would be better off. If a farmer feeds no corn silage, just hay and grain, he needs very little protein, which makes the feed people frown. When cows are on grass and clover, they need no protein, and you can still maintain a 17-18,000 lb. herd average, which is highly profitable. An average herd of 40 cows could be fed for \$1,000 per month cheaper than most people do. A lot of people don't believe it, but it's true. Another thing about the difference between picking corn or making silage you didn't mention is that an ag bagger will take a big chunk of that \$1,000 plus [cause] more health problems — to me no gain.

A Satisfied Grazer"

Response: Although we presently are not "graziers," we are interested in learning more about it. We are a young family with quite a bit of debt yet, and because of that we like to make sure we understand as much as possible before making a major change.

Our neighbors and friends who are grazing their dairy herd tell us several things:

(1) It takes more management than conventional feeding does because the quality changes almost daily, and the amount of feed per paddock varies greatly. Although there may be less physical work involved, it takes other management skills that most of us weren't taught, and the result may be disappointing unless we can find someone who is willing to teach us.

(2) There is nothing magic about grazing. Those who did well managing a conventional feeding system appear to be doing well with grazing. At certain times of

the year, you may have a high protein, low fiber ration, and at other times you may have a low protein, high fiber ration, so you need to adjust for that.

(3) Costs usually are lower. We wonder how much lower the costs really are, as it seems that most of my neighbors who switched to grazing had been using high cost feed programs including lots of "super minerals." Of course, grazing was much cheaper than these programs. How does grazing compare to other feed programs in which feed costs are lower than \$4.25 per cwt. of milk with a 70-lb. year round average?

We find the grazing concept interesting, but we have a lot of questions yet. Some of them are:

(1) With 90 acres of land how many cows and heifers could I feed?

(2) My brother and I share equipment costs. If we would go with all hay and no corn equipment, would that be a profitable way to gradually get into grazing?

## Grange Toy Contest Displays Efforts To Improve Lives

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)—For the 19th consecutive year the Women's Activities Department of the Pennsylvania State Grange is sponsoring its stuffed toys contest.

But this just isn't any contest.

In fact, the stuffed toy contest has evolved into something more than just another competition. It isn't about winning awards or accolades from peers. Or even being the best.

The only winners in this "Labor of Love" are the children who receive these toys. When nearly 1,000 Grangers from around the state descend upon Mercer County for the 123rd annual Pa. State Grange convention, they'll bring with them nearly 10,000 toys to be judged and then distributed to Ronald McDonald Houses, ambulance services, children's hospitals and other needy charities.

Most of the toys will be distributed to services located in the region of the host counties—Beaver,

Lawrence and Mercer. The stuffed toys program is sponsored by Fairfield Processing.

"These Grangers are more interested in toys for loving than toys for judging," Becky Michalka, Women's Activities director of the state Grange, said. "There were 8,975 toys made last year and according to the reports I've been receiving there is going to be a substantial increase this year."

The toys, however, won't be the only labor of love on display in the Radisson Hotel's Ballroom in West Middlesex. Over 1,000 baby quilts for HIV-positive and crack-addicted babies will be stacked to the ceiling.

"The ABC Quilts for AIDS babies is designed to make their lives a little more comfortable," Michalka said, "because many of these babies won't live to see their second birthday."

In addition to the toys and quilts, Grangers make clothing times for nursing homes, prepare food that is donated to food banks,

cut soup labels for charitable groups and develop kits containing personal care products that are distributed to abused women shelters, to name a few.

Michalka said being involved in these projects raises awareness among Grange members. "We have whole families that participate in these projects together," Michalka said. "By participating together as a family, it makes them aware of the problems in their communities and that families, by working together, can do something about these problems and make their communities a better place to live."

The Pennsylvania State Grange is an agricultural, rural and community service organization that is dedicated to making Pennsylvania a better place to live. There are over 33,000 members in the largest and oldest farm family organization in the state that is the legislative voice on agricultural and rural issues in Harrisburg.

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