

# Remain Flexible And Realize Profits With Grazing

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**CARLISLE** (Cumberland Co.)  
— In April 1992, David Forgey, columnist for Hoard's Dairyman and grass-based seasonal dairyman, began grazing his (now 150 cow) milking herd.

Since then, he's sold his TMR mixer and all the regular equipment used in conventional dairying and totally converted his farm to grazing.

Since then, he's not looked back. Instead, Forgey has converted most time in hoof trimming, mastitis and calf scour treatment, trying to grow corn on muck land, and many other headaches to steady and sometimes substantial increases in profits.

How does he do it? He's spent about \$7,000 to fence about 300 acres of his River-View Farm in Logansport, Ind., using rotational grazing to provide the feed and care his herd needs. All this amounts to more net profit, in the end, compared to conventional dairying.

Forgey spoke to about 200 dairy farmers (many of whom are already graziers) and agri-industry related representatives on Wednesday at the annual Pennsylvania Grazing Conference at The Embers in Carlisle.

Forgey spoke the first day of a two-day seminar at The Embers about how to begin a grazing program and make it work on a variety of farm enterprises.

The Cass County, Indiana dairyman is the third generation to manage a dairy on the farm. His farm sign reads, "All We Have We Owe To Udders." Along with his wife and one herdsman, Forgey maintains a herd of 150 head of Holstein cows and a DHIA rolling herd average between 18,000-20,000 pounds.

Forgey began using TMR in the early 1970s and has used a private nutritional consultant since 1980. The farm maintains not only herd production records but a complete laboratory analysis of both soils and forages.

In 1991, under his old dairy confinement system, net income per cow was only \$152. In 1995, with 142 cows in the milking herd, Forgey posted a net profit per cow of \$220. He indicated that net profits have increased to more than 20 percent of gross sales.

One of the reasons Forgey realized improved profits was that equipment repair was down. He also sold a lot of farm equipment he didn't need anymore. In 1995, with 142 cows, on the herd average he obtained 17,682 pounds of milk.

Because of the drought of 1988, coupled with devalued farm land in the 1980s, Forgey realized his operation was in trouble. He set out in 1991 to rotationally graze the heifers. After the terrible drought and the subsequent corn crops loss of 1991, Forgey began realizing how grazing could allow him to survive the summer without supplemental feed.

Forgey began grazing the milk-

ing herd in April 1992 and supplemented no additional forage until October of that year. They began to purchase a grain mix in one-inch pellet form containing about 18 percent crude protein (as a binding agent). The next year, they continued grazing, making additional feed adjustments, but using pastures with alfalfa/orchardgrass mixtures, and others with bromegrass, reeds canarygrass, fescue,

bluegrass, and switchgrass. Soil types determine grass breaks.

To make the program work, Forgey maintains a flexible schedule. The key is to get the cows grazing early and avoid the stresses of the day.

The cows are milked at 1 a.m. and 1 p.m. The milking is early so "we can start grazing at sunrise," said Forgey. The grazing is finished by 8 a.m.-9 a.m. and the cows are brought back in from the midday summer sun. The important thing is to "get the stress of them and graze them before dark," said Forgey.

This provides a "more consistent milk flow," he said. "Time is critical in this to make the system work."

Forgey explained the layout of his farm, which uses a system of paddocks with water lines buried underneath. Each paddock measures about 1/4 acre and is enclosed with single-strand high-tensile wire. Wiring is underground.

Forgey uses a "leader-follower" system. Starting from 8- to 10-inch plant size, the milking herd is allowed to graze the top 3- to 4-inches and then moved to another paddock. This is usually done in a 12-hour period so the cows go to a new paddock after each milking. The bred heifers are then allowed to graze for the next 12 hours and harvest the lesser-quality forage, which is very adequate for heifer growth and

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Tom Calvert, left, sheep producer from Somerset County, was honored for his work with extension and SCS with the 1995 Pasture Management Specialist of the Year Honor. The award was formerly announced at the national meeting of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly SCS, in Wichita, Kan. At the grazing conference, Duane Pysner, grassland management specialist with NRCS, presented the award.

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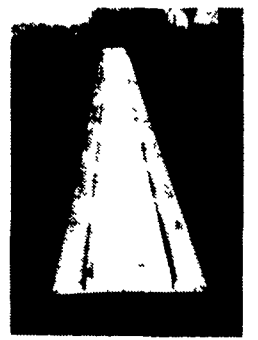


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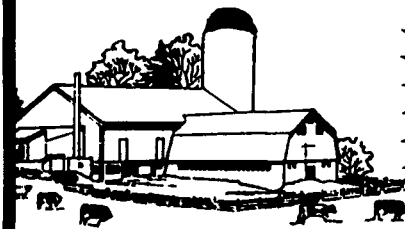
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