

For Sells, Farm Store Livelihood

1965, Sell and Grace purchased the farm.

In 1970, the Sells installed a freestall barn and silos. As the herd size was increased, the same year a double-6 herringbone milking parlor was installed, with 12 milking units.

In 1975, a 7,200 square foot farm store was built. Hubert noted that the store began as a way to recoup some of the loss when the Lehigh Valley Milk Co-Op went bankrupt, which caused great consternation with the family.

"We wanted to determine our own destiny as closely as we could," said Hubert. "We didn't want to rely on somebody else."

Back then, they sold milk in varying containers and percentages of milkfat. Then, "we were lucky" if

to handle payment for family members on a farm.

"We're six in this family, and anything you can do to keep any ill feelings (at bay) — they all have their hearts in it, they're all proud of what they do. They're all doing a bangup job. They're doing a so much better job than I could."

One son, Ron, manages Crystal Spring Electric, a company that contracts for private businesses and home. The farm company was instrumental in wiring a new office constructed at the farm, including security and water monitoring systems. The company also installed a network of 10 computers, all with Windows NT software with access to the Internet at every location, according to Ron.

The computers monitor time

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the store sold 50 gallons of skim milk a week, said Sell. Now, the major portion of the milk sold at the store is low-fat. Two percent milk is a favorite, according to sales figures.

But the store itself was begun with the intention of selling other items as well. First it was a full-service, seven-day-a-week family restaurant. But after 10 years of operation ("We made good money," Sell said), "We had family burnout." At the peak of the restaurant business, Crystal Spring included a steam bar.

But now "all we do is have deli items," he noted, with an ice cream parlor. The parlor is a favorite for visitors. This past August, Sell noted the store made 1,000 gallons of ice cream for customers.

The ice cream business has prevailed because of the time the business spent in developing flavors that met their own expectations. But it's a challenge to "come up with something that really has good mouth feel, good flavor, and flavor left in the mouth," Sell said.

"If you use fresh milk and fresh cream and use natural products, natural flavorings, that helps," he said.

Sell hears customer comments about the ice cream they sell.

charged to the clock, using time clock job-costing software. The software is undergoing testing and will be up and running soon.

All of Sell's sons grew up in the business and understand the different aspects. Ron is in charge of the electrical and computer monitoring of the business. Gary is in charge of the crops and does some milking. Scott is the herdsman in charge of feeding and care of the animals.

Audrey, their daughter, is in charge of payroll and all ordering for the store. Two daughter-in-laws — Lisa, Scott's wife, works in the business and Ron's wife, Susan, markets the business. Audrey's son, Chris, 14, helps milk and her other son, Adam, 16, freezes and packages ice cream and helps in the retail operation.

There are several standout features of the state conservation farm. Sell, a county conservation district cooperator since 1967, constructed a glass-lined steel manure storage facility in 1985. Storage capacity is 500,000 gallons, which is emptied about three times a year.

According to Sell, the last 10 years the farm has been practicing nutrient management by starting with a storage area. All the manure

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"If there's a problem, you're going to hear that (from customers) real quick," Sell noted. "If it's really good, if they're really tickled with it, you won't hear as much comment, but you'll have feedback on it."

At one time the farm store tried selling homegrown produce. But the work was too time-consuming for the Sells, and they went locally to other growers to pick up produce.

Sell noted that each of his sons already average 90 hours per week of work, and have worked up to 100 hours. He knows, because his sons punch a time clock and get paid by the hour.

Sell believes that is the fair way

goes into the storage facility.

Sell quickly points out how important it is to have the storage facility.

"It doesn't just benefit the environment. It benefits the farmer's pocketbook. Those nutrients are worked right in immediately. We want every ounce of nutrient plant food available in the manure. Another reason is, we're up against a lot of development, and the sooner we get that manure in and under, the sooner we can get rid of the odor or fly problems that could develop."

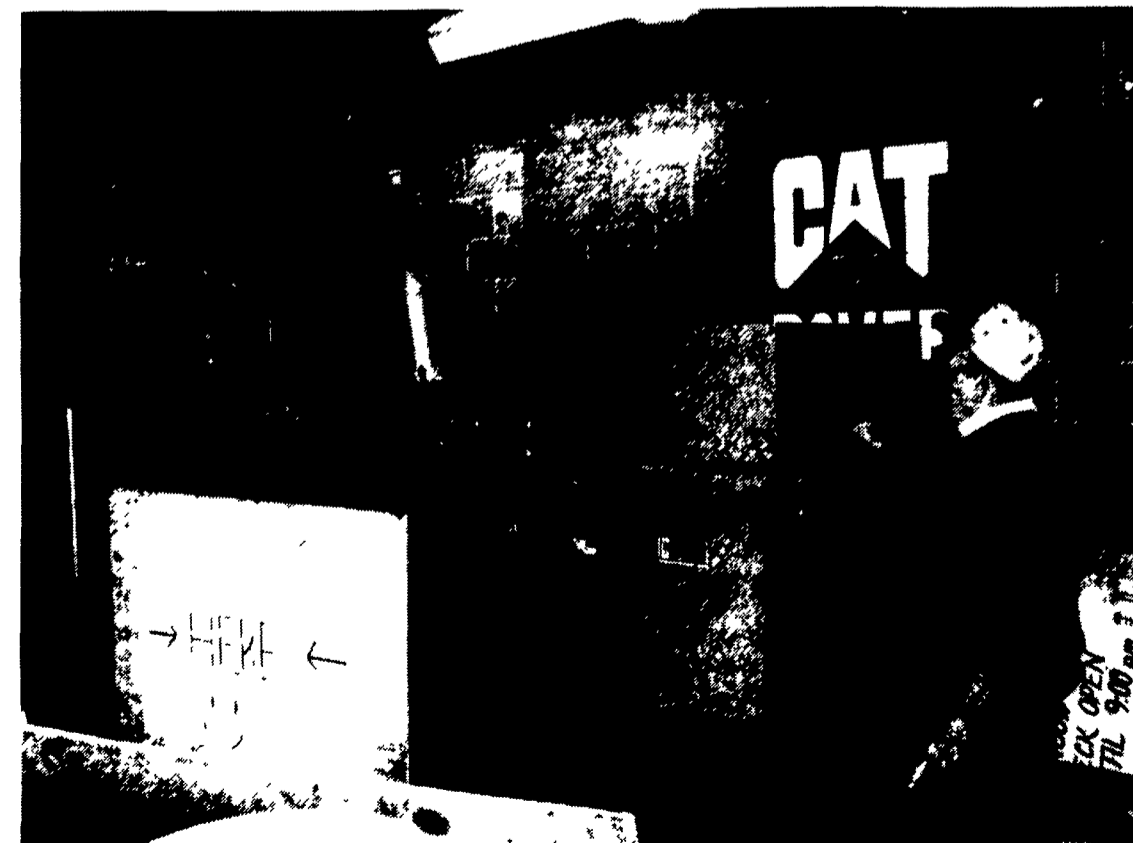
To protect Coplay Creek and the spring on their farm, they recently converted 10 acres of highly erodible cropland to permanent pasture.



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They double-crop rye on 65 acres which allows them to utilize more of their manure in the fall. Corn acreage numbers about 165 acres and alfalfa about 80 acres. Gary Sell feeds the helpers.



In 1975, a 7,200 square foot farm store was built. Here, Hubert Sell switches off the 205 kilowatt, 314-horsepower generator.