

Erie County Dairy Is Rooted In Orchardgrass

(Continued from Page 1)

ond cutting is ready so much quicker. If you let it go too long, it matures quick. If you wait until June to mow, you might as well wait until July. The quality is gone," he emphasized.

Because spring often means lots of rain, Heintz tries to take advantage of all the good drying days he can.

"I mow in the rain sometimes when I know that it's going to get nice. The water will be shooting right out of the mower, but I'll have hay ready to dry," said Heintz. "Sometimes you'll get caught, but if you don't get it cut, you'll get caught too."

What do you do if there is a wet hole in the field?" You mow around it, said Heintz.

"You can catch the spot that didn't get mowed the next time," said Heintz. "What is left in the field is really a small percentage of the whole crop."

Heintz's jump-start on haying does more than provide him with enough forage to feed his 20-cow herd. It also gives him average protein levels of 18 to 25 percent in his haylage.

To get the best results, Heintz says you also have to feed the grass. Over the course of a five-cutting summer, he applies 150 pounds of actual nitrogen to the crop.

"It responds well to the nitrogen. We can control the protein content of the grass by both maturity and fertilizer," he said.

As a rule of thumb, Heintz estimates that about one acre of orchardgrass will provide the forage for one cow for one year. To be on the safe side, Heintz jumps that figure to 1.25 acres per cow per year.

Besides haylage and dry hay, he also feeds high moisture corn to his herd and a purchased concentrate balances out his total mixed ration.

His herd average rolls at 19,000 pounds of milk, but he's working to get that figure closer to 20,000 pounds of milk.

One problem he frequently finds is that many feeding programs are based on legume forages.

"Grass does have a problem. It has a high NDF. We don't have a lot of experience feeding this. Nobody really knows much about it. There's hardly any work done on feeding these high quality grasses," he said.

He'd like to see more research conducted on feeding high quality grasses to lactating dairy cows. On the all grass program Heintz said he is making more money, but he's not making as much milk per cow.

"My goal is to get my milk production back by figuring out how to feed these cows right," he said.

As for intensive grazing, Heintz notes that not all farmers could manage that program.

"Grazing really takes good management," said Heintz. "There are farms here that could work with grazing, but those are limited. What I'm doing could fit anyone's schedule."

Little things are important when it comes to managing his grasses, too.

"The biggest thing with orchardgrass is the harvesting schedule. You have to knock it down. Everything else is simple," he said.

After his mid-May initial cutting, Heintz noted that you have only three weeks before the mower needs to be in the field once again.

"If I cut the 25th of May, the orchardgrass is ready to go on June



This orchardgrass stand is managed for high quality forage, Heintz noted.

15th," he said.

About mid-July it's time to once again pull your mower to the fields to take the third cutting off.

In a typical summer, a dormancy period usually follows where the grass slows its growth. Again, Heintz is careful to watch the weather patterns. If it is going to rain, he spreads some more nitrogen on the fields and prepares to harvest a fourth and possibly fifth cutting.

Heintz usually puts the first two cutting in the silo and harvests the third and fourth as dry hay and puts his fifth cutting either in the silo or up as baled hay.

The Heintz farm has been in total grass for about seven years including some ryegrass and reed canary grass. Before that time he tried the more conventional forages, including timothy, clover, and alfalfa.

"The legumes can't compete with the grass," said Heintz. "We can plant alfalfa and get a couple of cuttings the first year and by the second year we've lost half of it and the next year it's all gone. In March, the alfalfa roots are thrown right up out of the ground."

Also you can't cut a legume too early or it will stress the plant.

"With grass, you can't hurt it," said Heintz.

He finds that relying on grass is a win-win situation for everyone. Manure supplies all the potash and phosphorous that the grass needs, so the only fertilizer he needs is the nitrogen.

He has also found that his crop rotation is a bit askew.

"Because of the persistence of the orchardgrass, I don't have a corn rotation anymore. I have to plow down good hay ground. It's a win-win situation. It just keeps going for you."

Last year Heintz notilled some orchardgrass in sod that had been killed with Roundup. "I used a grain drill and had a very good establishment," he said.

Heintz's different approach to feeding his herd of cows has grown out of his own experiences.

After receiving his degree in poultry husbandry from the California Poly Technical Institute, he did a three-year stint in the Peace Corps in the Republic of the Congo (formerly

Zaire) where he taught vocational agriculture. His wife, Judy, also served in the Peace Corps in the Republic of the Congo.

He and his wife and their two children — George, who is attending college and Jill, who is employed off the farm — settled in Erie because that's the area that George grew up in.

He began dairying largely because that was the agriculture that was around him.

"When you're in the Peace Corps, you do what is around you. You don't come in to an area and change everything. There are no chickens here, so you dairy."

The profession must have agreed with him because he has been working at it for 20 years. "We don't make a lot of money, but we have a lot of fun," he said.

As the spokesperson for the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council, Heintz has had the opportunity to address fellow farmers at various

events. Recently he traveled to Wyoming County, Pennsylvania to participate in the Northeast Quality Forages Conference.

With farming and public speaking experience under his belt, Heintz will next be off to the National Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting where he will represent Pennsylvania and compete for the national spokesperson title. The meeting is scheduled for early March in Indianapolis, Ind.

Quick to point out that he is always learning something new, Heintz noted that he is open to questions or comments from fellow dairymen and anyone interested in growing high quality grasses and feeding them to lactating dairy cows.

I'm looking to learn all I can, and I'm willing to share all that I know," said Heintz.

He can be contacted at (814) 438-2465 or you can write to him at 9009 Concord Rd., Union City, PA 16438.

PFGC Schedules Annual Meeting And Awards Reception

GRANTVILLE (Dauphin Co.) — The PFGC has set the evening of March 4, during the Pennsylvania Grazing & Forage Conference for its annual meeting and awards reception here at the Holiday Inn.

This year we are planning an evening reception with hors d'oeuvres and time to talk and mingle with

others before a brief PFGC meeting and the presentation of this year's PFGC awards.

You can register for the awards reception when you register for the Grazing Conference. Note that it is not required that you attend the Grazing Conference to attend the evening reception.

Van To AFGC Conference

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — The PFGC board has rented a van to take members to the national meeting of the American Forage and Grassland Council in Indianapolis on March 8 - 10.

The AFGC Conference includes

"how to" presentations by forage growers, presentations of current research findings, and farm tour.

If you are interested in taking the PFGC van to Indianapolis, call Marvin Hall at (814) 863-1019 to reserve a seat.

