

# Grazing Conference Focus: Cost Of 100 Pounds Milk Production On The Farm

EVERETT NEWSWANGER  
Managing Editor

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)  
— The meeting of farmers working to decrease production costs through the utilization of pastures in grazing was held this week as the 5th annual Southeast Pennsylvania Grazing Conference. Sponsored by the Lancaster County Grazers under the theme of "Increasing Profits in a Depressed Market," soil management and reduction of input costs were the major topics of discussion.

On Monday, Gary Zimmer, Wisconsin organic farmer and soil consultant, opened the conference on the premise that the soil is the stomach of the plant. And the plants you feed the cows provide a balanced, healthful diet if the soil nutrients and minerals are also in balance.

"Healthy soils keep the animals healthy," Zimmer said.

Jerry Swisher, Augusta County, Virginia extension agent and grazing consultant, presented profiles of successful grass farmers in Virginia. These farms use grazing or partial grazing as a management tool to bring down costs. Often total production drops, but the bottom line gets better when farms switch to grazing, according to Swisher's report.

At least one farm in the profiles uses seasonal dairying where a large part of the herd is bred to freshen in the late winter to best utilize the growing season for grass, and the remainder of the herd is bred in the fall to carry the milk flow over the winter.

Jim Landis, a dairyman from Georgia, returned again this year to bring the economics of dairying into focus. He is very critical of articles in *Lancaster Farming* that

show top production, show cows, and promote the idea that milk prices are too low.

In his topic "Do you know your cost per hundred weight?" Landis said most farmers do not know this cost and thus cannot make adjustments to improve their bottom lines. He said you can't do much about the milk price, but you have almost total control over every production cost.

Landis divides these costs into operating and capital use costs. To get started, he said you need to set a period of time and take inventory of everything on the farm at the beginning and the end of this period. A one year period is usually best because you include all the seasonal fluctuations.

Knowing the increase or decrease of your inventory of hay, silage, and stored grains is important information you need so you can figure cost per hundredweight. And the change in value of these resources from one year to the next is often overlooked on the bottom line.

Of course you need to account for all your feed, labor, energy, irrigation, and service costs under operating expenses. For capital use costs you should consider the value of your farm and figure the interest costs if you borrowed the whole amount. If you have machinery housed on the farm, count it as a capital expense. If you rent machinery or services, it goes on the operating side. Obviously, lower capital investment lowers your cost per hundredweight.

These three speakers returned for topics the second day of the conference. In addition, Nate Leonard, a grazing consultant from New York State, spoke about how to establish and maintain good

stands of grass. And Nevin Mast, a Pennsylvania organic dairy farmer, discussed the problems and

methods of making the switch from conventional to organic production.

Tapes of all sessions are available. For more information contact Arden Landis (717) 529-6644.

## Weaver Family Earns PASA Leadership Award

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started practicing low-input/sustainable farming methods after experiencing family and herd health problems.

The Weavers currently rotate crops on contoured strips, use no pesticides, incorporate pre-digested manure into the soil within 24 hours, and cultivate their crops. Don believes their 23,000-pound herd average is rising because they've been concentrating on cow comfort, improving the farm's water quality, and growing better forages.

Over 500 people registered for PASA's two-day conference which took place at the Penn State Hotel and Conference Center (formerly the Scanton).

The opening keynote speaker Denise O'Brien spoke optimistically about the future, about creating "a more just and sustainable food system." A farm activist for 21 years, O'Brien raises poultry, berries, vegetables and tree fruit in Iowa. She chairs the Women, Food and Agriculture Network, a support and mentoring organization for women in all sectors of sustainable agriculture. She is past president of the National Family Farm Coalition.

During a session on local cooperative milk marketing, experts from two cooperatives discussed how their co-ops were started. Earl Spencer from Allied Federated Cooperative in New York outlined Allied's services to its members, all county-based, member driven co-ops. "We actually promote MORE co-op start-ups through our federation," stated Spencer. Members of the Pioneer Valley Milk Producers Co-op told

how in Western Massachusetts last year, farmers from 60 local dairy operations gathered to explore the possibility of marketing their milk under a value-added label. The "Get Milk . . . Locally" campaign was launched in September and has doubled sales for members in just five months.

Renowned Iowa hog producer, Tom Frantzen spoke about various types of pasture areas, the number, length of time, and animals best suited for grazing, plus fence and water systems. He urged farmers to examine their farming operations for loss of biodiversity, eroding top soil, depleting water resources, and an increasing dependence upon outside inputs. When talking about raising hogs with minimal confinement, which he has done for 25 years, Frantzen humorously added that the ideal hog house pays for itself in three years and self-destructs in five!

Dale and Kate Thomsen of Willow Springs Farm in Bedford County spoke of their poultry and dairy sheep operation. The Thomsons market fresh (not frozen) pastured poultry during the summer months and sheep cheese throughout the winter. Although they've chosen not to label their products "organic," the Thomsons believe in raising animals for food in a healthy way.

Jim McLaughlin of the Pastured Poultry Association of South Central New York (PPA SCNY) talked about his organization's growth into a soon-to-be state association. Since its inception, PPA SCNY has purchased a mobile processing unit, enabled its members to buy bulk feed, and increased awareness concerning the

importance of sanitation in preventing diseases such as Avian Flu.

In a session on the Milk Marketing Initiative, Lori Sandman, Project manager for the Dairy Network Partnership (DNP), discussed the progress of the Partnership, a collaboration of diverse agencies such as Rodale Institute, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, PASA, Penn State, EPA, and others. The DNP's purpose is to improve environmental quality through market-based incentives to farmers implementing a pollution prevention plan aimed at farmyard improvements impacting water quality.

Featured speaker Kathleen Merrigan, a Washington-based senior analyst for the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture close the conference with her Tale of Two Agricultures. Merrigan said sustainability is about agriculture and more. "It's about communities in co-operation, answering a deeper need we all have — to create on earth an environment, in all senses of the word, able to sustain future generations," proclaimed Merrigan, a former staffer for the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee who serves on the Steering Committee of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture is a member-based organization dedicated to promoting a healthy food supply through profitable farming designed to sustain the environment for future generations. For more information, call at (814) 349-9856, or write PASA, P.O. Box 419, Millheim, PA 16854.

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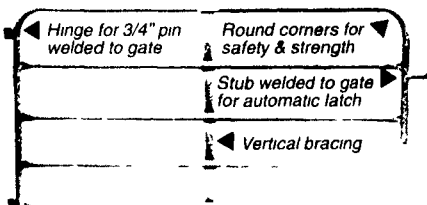
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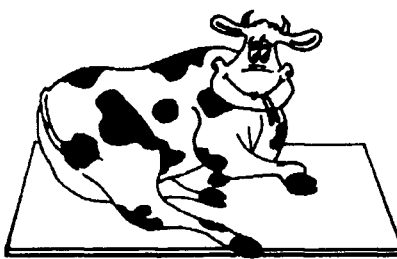


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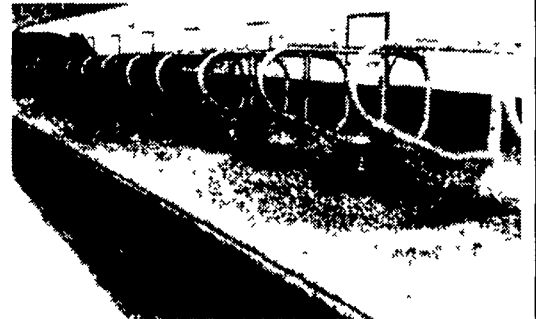
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