

What Do These Graziers Do When The 'Summer Slump' Arrives?

ANDY ANDREWS

Lancaster Farming Staff

GRANTVILLE (Dauphin Co.) — A Middletown dairy producer with Jersey cows summed up his equipment needs rather succinctly: a three-wheeler to open up the gates for his grazing cows, a forage cutter, and cows.

That's it.

Like many graziers who have been operating successfully for years, Tom Williams of Bryncoed Farm, Middletown, and others who spoke at the Pennsylvania Grazing and Forage Conference in March believe that with grazing, cows are healthier — and the owners are, too.

"We make livestock work for us — we don't work for them," said Lawrason Sayre, owner of Waffle Hill Farm in Churchville, Md., who spoke at the conference.

"I really believe that, the longer I'm (using rotational grazing), the more I'm convinced that grass and short grains are the way to go," said Nevin Mast, who operates a farm in Oley.

However, all the producers realize that while rotational grazing can mean improved herd health with less overhead costs, there are still management practices necessary to get through the difficult summer slumps.

Mast purchased the farm in the mid-1970s which at the time contained 45 milk cows and 40 young stock on the 120-acre farm 12 miles east of Reading, Berks County. At the time, the family planted 50 acres of corn and the same in alfalfa, with approximately 20 acres in permanent pasture. They also double-cropped 20 acres of rye.

The cows were milked in a tiestall barn and everything was fed from silos, including high moisture corn, haylage, and corn silage for dry cows and heifers. In 1982, the dairy milked



Conference speakers included, from left, Nevin Mast, Oley; Lawrason Sayre, Churchville, Md.; and Tom Williams, Middletown.

23,000 pounds on their herd average and then put in a TMR mixer.

On the suggestion of the consultant, more inputs were added to boost production. However, Mast noted that profits were short-lived because of the failing health of the cattle, heart attacks, misplaced abomasums, and foot and reproduction problems. Feed and vet bills were subsequently higher.

In the early 1990s, Mast went to a meeting where he found out about grazing. Soon after, a grazing program began at the farm with 15 acres of pastureland with high tensile fence.

Paddocks were set up. Additionally, about 5-10 acres of new pasture were added per year.

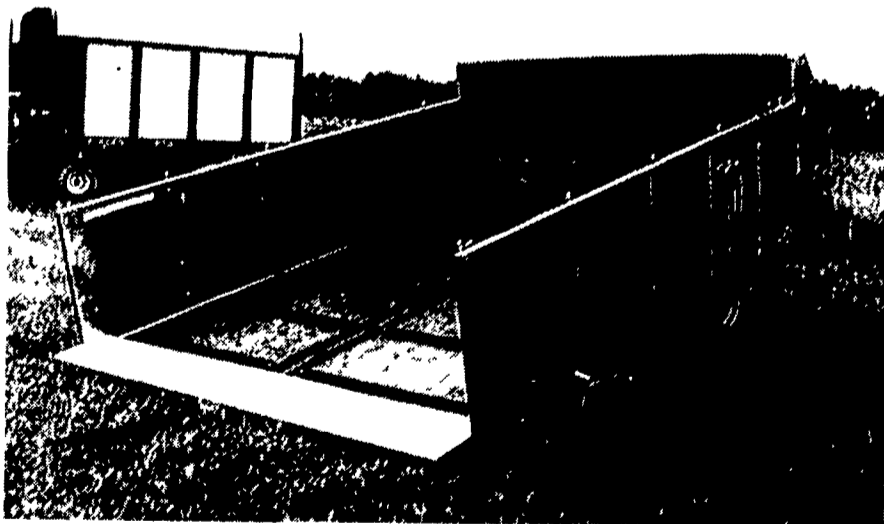
For the summer slump days, milk cows were left in the barn during daytime heat and fed haylage from silos. For the milk cows, each day's feeding came mostly from silos during the summer. During the day, dry cows and heifers were the follower group in the

paddocks.

To supplement feed because of dry, droughty weather the past year, the farm added several acres of sudan-grass planted in mid-May at approximately 40-50 pounds per acre. They began feeding about July 1 and the grass regrew every 10 days through mid-September. Cows went in when

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