

While this composite of two photographs doesn't match up exactly, it gives an idea of the features of the Skyline Acres dairy facility. Notice the 14-foot sidewalls with curtains. The front walls are also 14 feet high, but the curtain drop from the top. In front of the end curtains, in front of each support post, are pipes that serve to prevent the end walls from excessive flapping in the wind, reducing wear and tear and noise. The automatic Houle floor scaper system cleans the freestall floor every four hours. The manure is gravity fed to a lagoon. Siting the facility on top of a fairly treeless hilltop ridge allows maximum use of natural ventilation, as well as great liquid flow control — storm water can be diverted away easily and manure doesn't

need to be pumped as hard or as much as some operations with level or elevated manure storage facilities. On the far left is the entrance to the dairy facility, which requires biosecurity measures, mainly disposable vinyl boots, for guests and visitors. Someone milking in the parlor can be seen from the parking lot in front of the entrance by looking through the double glass doors and through the lobby. Feed bins, bunker silos and feed mixer are located about a couple of hundred yards away from the freestall and milking parlor, down the hill in the valley at the older dairy barn where John Hix lives with his family in the two-family dairy operation. The feed is mixed and loaded and then hauled up to the freestall for drive through feeding.

## Berks County Dairy Adds New Level To Milking System

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ty, operator comfort was considered equally with cow comfort, and also because it was designed to provide opportunities for the children of the two couples.

With 800 acres of cropland, Skyline Acres concentrates on quality milk production. They sell to Clover Farms Dairy Company in Reading.

The herd is not the largest in the state, but the current 450-head herd represents more than a doubling of the herd the families had been milking.

Such a jump in size is something that was considered carefully, according to John Hix.

He said he was aware from his experiences and those of others that as good as the job opportunities are with such a business expansion, the risks are great.

The future of the children was considered as a major reason for expansion, Hix said.

"The opportunity is here for them," he said, but quickly added that whether the children take those opportunities, "You can't plan that."

Employed at the farm are John and Donna's three children Jennifer, 24, Michael, 23, and Mark, 18; and coming up are Terry and Kim's children, Derrick, 17, and Laura, 15.

The farming acreage is on the rolling hills just east of the village of Shartelsville. It is characteristic western Berks County, kind of a hill-and-dale geography.

According to John, the work responsibilities are fairly well divided.

His brother Terry does all the herd work, breeding, and herd management. John does the crop work.

Terry's wife takes care of young calves, John's daughter Jennifer takes care of the dry cows and vaccinations. His son Mark feeds young stock among other things, while Michael, a recent college graduate, does rations and just about all the feeding, working with a nutritionist.

"Everybody pretty well has their jobs," John said, "something they do that no one else has to bother with."

The basic outline of the new dairy facility is a 450-freestall barn with 14-foot high curtained sidewalls and end walls, a 10- to 12-foot alley way for cows going to the parlor via a breezeway, with a three-foot wide single return alley with an automatic sorter gate.

The parlor is actually a double-18 rapid release parallel Surge setup currently being used as a double-12.

The quick release parlor is unique in the area mainly for two reasons: it features a single alley cow return, with a crossover bridge so one side can cross over to the other side and exit through one alley; and it is called a "subway" parlor.

The parlor is called a subway system because it has a third, lower floor beneath the pit floor. It has three levels — one for the cows, one for the milkers, and one for the meters.

It is also unique because the milking floor of the parlor has been outfitted to be adjustable to the height of the milker.

It has been outfitted with six air bags beneath a 3,000-pound frame and vinyl finished floor cap.

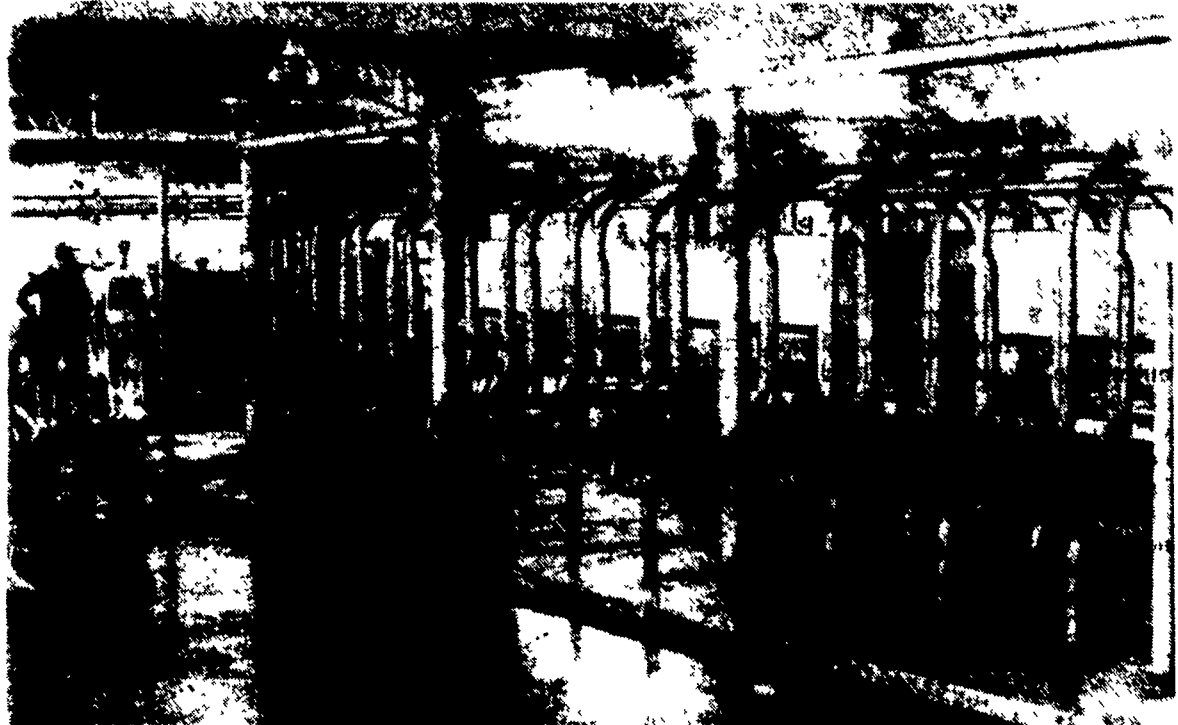
The parlor is not much different from other computerized parlors outfitted with meters, except, instead of having all the meters located immediately next in line to the milking claws, the vacuum pipeline extends from the milkers down through the parlor floor to a "basement" room where the meters are in line, and electronic data is automatically available to the main farm computer.

The farm can generate its own production charts and graphs.

It can't do individual somatic cell testing, and though the Hixes have dropped using official dairy herd improvement testing, they may pick it up again for certain functions. John said there's just been too much other activity occupying their minds and time to be able to concentrate on some of those other details.

The Hix's have been progressive dairy farmers.

"My dad originally started dairy farming at the home farm in 1945, about a mile and half from new



This is the cow floor in the milking parlor, one side of the double-18 parallel parlor that is outfitted with 12 milking systems. The additional capacity can be used in case the decision is made to expand the herd.



This is the subway, showing one wall of the milk weight testers. The information is computerized and automatically linked to the cow so that the operator can know each cows daily output and know immediately if there is a significant change, which could indicate a health problem. The subway allows this part of the milking system to be isolated from the milking floor, and its normal mess and moisture. That minimizes the amount of cleaning of equipment after each milking, which theoretically should reduce milking time, as well as tasks.