

Berks County Dairy Adds New Levels To Milking System

(Continued from Page A27) animal. What we talked about building and what was really built are two different animals."

John said the experience has been enjoyable, and "interesting," a word he said he probably uses too much.

"I used the term, 'interesting.' Everything that you go through and the people you talk to and different ideas that people have about building things. It's interesting."

Sometimes finding an existing example of what John had in mind proved impossible.

"I went through this last year. We tried to go to see a milking parlor that had a single basement, like we built, and a single return. But we couldn't find any that were built that way. And then they

designed it (for John) and we told them how we wanted it.

"I want to people to know, when they come here, where the front door is. Also when (a visitor) walks through the lobby and goes to the parlor, I wanted to walk in, under that crossover bridge and not know that I was walking under cows. I wanted all the ceilings at the same height. That lobby ceiling and cross-over appear to be the same," he said.

It has been achieved.

"I'm fortunate, I guess, in that I could see some of it, though I couldn't see everything," he said. "I saw an awful lot and was in on how everything was going to fit together and what this was going to accomplish. Not everybody would be that involved," he said,

implying that custom building can require more of the customer than ordering a duplicate of an existing structure or facility.

For example, John said that one of the poured concrete walls stuck out in to the line of vision from the lobby, and he didn't think it was necessary. After two weeks, he had the contractor cut off the projecting section.

"I wanted to try to minimize the number of things that later would make me say, 'I wish I would have done this,'" Hix said.

"It was just me. I want to be able to sit in the parking lot and see the man milking in the parlor. The wall, the way it was there, cut down on the view. It's not really important, but I tried to make it important."

The wall didn't make a difference structurally, but aesthetically it made all the difference, he said. It also didn't interfere with contractor cooperation.

"We all really clicked," John said, "and we knew what was in each other's head. It's really hard to get through from one person's head into another person's head and be on the same wavelength. We talked about this thing a long

time. It was all interesting to see it come together. It's amazing, when people are all on the same page, what you can accomplish. It's fun."

When the Hix's started the project they were milking about 180 cows. "I told the banker I figure we want to be around 230 cows by time we move, and we were milking 235 when we moved in Dec. 15."

John said they want to be milking 300 by the end of January and 400 by the end of February.

"We were milking 280 by the end of January; 365 to 370 by the end of February to mid-March; and then 400 and the milk tank ran over April 1.

"The time frames I did in my head and I knew why — payments started April 25. I knew why we needed to do certain things and you work toward the time frame."

Other planning involved sitting down with a lender and presenting

a business plan.

"We cash-flowed it at 410 (cows) at a 19,500 (pounds of milk) herd average," John said.

"We just about doubled our herd. Doubling a herd isn't as difficult as some people trying to get five times as what they're milking. That is very difficult.

"We knew that from the original farm, when dad went from 50 cows to 110 cows. At that time it was only doubling the herd, but you didn't know a lot of the things that happen when you go from stanchion to a freestall," he said.

Today is a little different, he said.

"There's a lot more information out there, and a lot of more people out there who can help you prepare for situations like that," John said.

"I think it's easier today (to plan for an expansion and technology change) if you're not afraid to ask for advice and then figure out if it is good advice."

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