

# Frustrated With Conventional Farming, Grazier Employs New Ideas

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"The paddocks are variable. Not all of them are the same size. This is such a hilly farm and a wet farm that different areas mature at different times," Simpson said.

To supplement the cows over the winter months or in case of severe weather, Simpson makes hay from the lush spring growth. He also buys TMR to supplement the cows, if needed.

He machine hires most of the work that involves equipment and is able to rent his father's equipment for mowing hay or hauling manure out of the holding pen. He also rents additional ground from his father to graze his 32 cows and 17 bred heifers.

"As far as equipment investment, I have a four-wheeler and a cart," said Simpson.

Seasonal production can also be tricky to maintain, often leading to higher cull rates than Simpson would like to have.

"The first year I had a 40 percent cull rate and we milked 90 percent 2-year-olds that I had started two years previously," he said. "I'm learning. There are lots of mistakes to be made. That's part of the reason I'm playing so much with the genetics. I'm trying to fit an animal to the environment I live in. We need a cow to go out and harvest in all kinds of conditions, no matter if its hot, cold, whatever," he said.

This year he estimates a 25 percent cull rate on cows and plans for a 90 percent conception rate on heifers to be bred for next season. He uses a herd sire because he was having difficulty settling the cows with artificial insemination to keep them on the seasonal schedule.

"Any cows not due by the 15th of June are gone," he said.

Thankfully, he notes that most of the cows he culled went for dairy purposes.

With grazing, Simpson also sees a



The Simpsons also keep several layers on their farm to supply the family with fresh eggs.

tremendous improvement in the health of the herd, especially the feet.

"My vet bill for all of 1998 was \$675," he said.

Cows aren't the only livestock that nibble grass at Simpson's farm.

He also raises pasture poultry on his 170-acre farm, where he calls 80 acres grazable land.

The meat chickens are in pens and the pens are moved around the farm either in front of or behind the cows, depending on the height of the grass. He processes the birds on the farm and has developed several strong markets in the area. Every year he raises and butchers five batches of birds which he markets for \$1.45 per pound.

The poultry also help fertilize the fields resulting in better grass growth.

Things can get pretty hectic at the farm in the spring months when all the calves are coming, the new batch of chickens arrives, and the hay needs to be cut, but Simpson says he loves the work.

"All the cows calve at once, so you deal with that. The chickens come at the same time into the brooder barns. But the calves all get fed milk for a certain period of time and they're all weaned in a 30-day period, so there's no more calf feeding. They all get dehorned, vaccinated all at the same time because they're all the same age, and it makes the management of this stuff so much easier," he explained. "I love spring and I feel like working in spring."

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Simpson also raises pasture poultry. The pens are moved around the pasture to provide plenty of feed for the chickens. Simpson raises and butchers five groups per season.

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