

Dairy Day Message

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home, Snider welcomed Marty Smith, Ron Kline, Glenn Gorrell, and Jerry Spencer to the stage. Each panelist brought a unique viewpoint to light.

Although still operating a small dairy, Marty Smith has begun a contract heifer-raising facility.

"Three years ago the milk price was bad and we had a bad crop year and we started looking at other things. First I went to work for other people. After working for myself, I found I didn't like working for others, so we looked into raising heifers," said Smith.

After careful planning and discussion, their facility was built in November 1998. In less than four months, their facilities were full.

"The banker we used to work with said there was not a market for this," noted Smith. "We proved them wrong."

The Smiths charge on a per-head per-day basis. They also take care of the necessities and whatever the client wants. They have also left options open for the future.

"We take pride in what we do," noted Smith.

For Ron Kline, bringing two sons into the business lead to a

major herd expansion and the building of new facilities.

"We studied this for two years and visited lots of other facilities before we built what we have. We have left room for more expansion if we choose to do that in the future."

Expanding the milking herd still left the Klins with some dilemmas. They are considering whether to have their heifers custom raised freeing additional space for more milking cows or to continue raising their own replacements. Nutrient management requirements are also on his mind. He is looking at a system to manage the manure flow.

Many factors went into the decision to expand their herd.

"I'm 55 years old," noted Kline. "I said, 'I've got the farm, now what do I do with it?' This is a way that I've got a retirement, my sons have equity and they can build their dream, and we all have more time for personal things."

Better debt management was one of the driving reasons behind Glenn Gorrell's decision to specialize in grazing with his 65-cow Holstein herd. After moving to Bradford County from Centre County in 1989, he noted that what really grows well in northeastern Pennsylvania is grass, so he decided to graze his cattle intensively.

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"Our herd health is excellent and we can do a lot with just two people. Our debt load was high and we needed to get ahead. This way our feed costs are low," explained Gorrell.

Although he supplements the cow's diet with corn silage and hay, they get about half of their dry matter from grass during the grazing season.

"Wherever the cows can walk, it's there to graze," said Gorrell.

Jerry Spencer works at the opposite end of the dairy specialization business. As a custom harvester, Spencer relies on other farmers to make a living.

"We had a fire in 1993 and to get back into the dairy business was impossible, but I had my equipment. I already had the dairy and did some custom operations, so it was an easy decision that custom harvesting would be my niche," said Spencer.

Keys to Spencer's success is keeping the farmers happy and having adequate dealer support.

"All my farmers work together," said Spencer. "Sometimes I don't know where I'm going next. The farmers have that all worked out. I also have to depend on my dealer support. If I don't have that, I couldn't do the job."

In the session on employees led by Lisa Holden, the importance of treating employees as an asset was at the forefront. She highlighted the need for organized recruitment, training, and motivation of employees in all situations. She also noted that it is helpful to have job descriptions and standard operating procedures for every position and task.

"Training is an investment in people," she said. "In training there is a definite process. First you prepare them for what they're going to do, then show them how to do it. Next, let them do it and finally review the steps. It's all the little things that count. A problem can start off with something very small and it can become a very large problem. That's where standard operating procedures come in."

If employee motivation is an area that needs improvement, there are incentives and bonuses that can be tied to performance.

"Incentives are an ongoing thing," said Holden, "like giving the milkers a part of the extra milk check dollars earned if the somatic cell level is kept at an acceptable level. A bonus is something special. You need to be creative."

No matter how organized the employer is, the people that you attract can make or break your operation.

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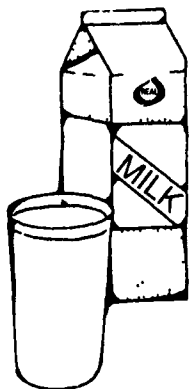
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