

Chambersburg Farmer Profits From Raising Heifers

JAYNE SEBRIGHT

Lancaster Farming Staff

CHAMBERSBURG (Franklin Co.) — Tim Saber of Sunnybrook Ag Resources in Chambersburg knows how to stay in the dairy business without actually milking cows. He raises 300 to 400 heifers each year and then leases them to area dairy producers as cows.

Currently Saber has more than 600 cows leased out to dairy producers throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York. He started raising heifers and leasing his cows about five years after his family decided to stop milking cows in 1989.

"We tried raising beef animals for about five years," said Saber. "But we didn't find it very profitable, so we switched to heifer raising."

Saber is in partnership with his two uncles who own the 400-acre farm and facilities where he farms. Their farm is located right in the heart of Chambersburg. Saber is responsible for managing the operation, while his uncles have a trucking, warehousing, and transportation business.

"Since our farm is located inside the Chambersburg borough, we are faced with development pressure," said Saber. "We've sold off about 50 acres for development. Some of it has gone to build a new church, another portion to build an addition to the hospital, and some for housing development. I get to farm with what acreage is left."

According to Saber, Sunnybrook Ag Resources is willing to work around the developments building up beside them.

"I do deal with odor issues," said Saber. "When a neighboring farm is hauling manure, I get blamed for the smell because our farm is the only one in the borough."

However, the biggest problem Saber has with development is the trash that contractors let behind when they're building new properties. Someone can look out over Saber's fields and find drainage pipe, paper trash, and other development byproducts scattered around.

"Another problem is that some of the people who rent the neighboring farms are against Sunnybrook's development," said Saber. "It is a shame that you can't do what you want to do."

Saber did what he wanted to do when he started his heifer raising business about five years ago.

"We got out of the dairy business after several long-time employees retired," said Saber. "We had trouble finding reliable help to replace them, especially since there are so many non-farm employment opportunities in Chambersburg."

Saber knew he didn't have the financial ability to put up a new facility and start dairying again. "We had the facilities to profit at something without putting out a pile of money or needing a huge amount of labor," said Saber.

Today Saber only has one full-time employee, Joe Cooley, helping him on the farm. Cooley has worked for Sunnybrook for more than 25 years.

"It is easier to do what I am doing now than it is to milk cows," said Saber.

Saber purchases newborn calves from the Greencastle Livestock Auction or from neighboring farmers, and then raises them to freshening age.

Then he leases them out to area farmers. The farmers have the option of keeping the heifer calves or returning the calves to Saber depending on their agreement.

"It is better for the dairyman to lease animals from me than to buy animals," said Saber. "You can pay the deposit for leasing six animals with what it costs to buy one."

After Saber receives the deposit, the farmer and he enter into a three-year lease. The farmer pays Saber a monthly fee based on the current milk price. At the end of the three-year period, there is also a small buyout price.

In the contract, Saber agrees to replace any animals that are lost due to transition problems. For instance, if a cow is lost due to significant calving problems, then Saber will replace the animals. However, if the cow develops mastitis or has other problems farther into the lease period, the farmer is required to replace the animal.

Saber starts his calves on a 20/20 all-milk milk replacer and then keeps them on Pennfield's heifer grower plan. The calves receive a Four-Once vaccination and receive a booster 14 days later. They also receive an annual Nine-Way vaccine.

Once the calves reach six months, Saber starts them on a total mixed ration formulated for 19 percent protein. The ration is made up of 85 percent forage with corn silage, barley-aye, and baled grass hay.

Saber breeds his animals at 15 months so that they're large when they go out on lease.

"I don't believe in calving ease bulls," said Saber. "I make sure the heifers are plenty big to handle full-sized calves."

Saber and Cooley handle most of the routine health practices and only get the veterinarian in for brucellosis testing and pregnancy checks.

Raising 300 to 400 heifers a year, Saber said he only loses three animals per year, which brings his mortality rate to one percent.

Saber raises corn, soybeans, grass hays, and winter grains on the farm's 400 acres. Last year he also harvested 60 acres of rye for a neighboring dairyman.

This year Saber purchased a self-propelled sprayer and is hoping to recoup some of the cost by doing custom spray application.

Saber is a founding member of the Professional Dairy Heifer Growers Association. PDHGA is an International group that host meetings on the latest innovations in heifer raising.

Saber is heading out to the annual convention in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 22 - 25. He is also on the planning committee for the northeast meeting scheduled for November in Akron, Ohio.



Saber feeds his heifers a total mixed ration to make sure that they get the right nutrients to grow into productive cows. He wants his animals on the large side when they go out to be leased.

Horse Farms Open House

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)—A dozen professional stables in the southeastern quadrant of Pennsylvania will open their doors to the public for the seventh annual Pennsylvania Horse Farms Open House Saturday and Sunday, April 8-9.

The Open House is a chance for both active and would-be equestrians to visit a variety of Pennsylvania's professional horse farms, to learn about various breeds and styles of riding, about raising, caring for and training horses, and to explore the many opportunities for getting involved with horses right in their own backyards.

The event, produced by Pennsylvania Equestrian and sponsored by Cargill Nutrena Feeds, is free and self-guided, and individuals travel from stable to stable in their own vehicles. The farms are open to visitors from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and noon-4 p.m. Sunday.

Again this year a number of stables will invite visitors to take a sample riding lesson, trail ride, or pony ride.

In addition to riding a horse, visitors to the open house can visit a petting zoo, audit a dressage clinic conducted by a nationally-known trainer and author, and watch a quadrille (four riders performing in unison). Demonstrations of the latest horseshoeing and round pen training techniques will be conducted, along with sessions on saddle fitting, genetics, showmanship, natural horsemanship, and foal imprinting.

Visitors can take a break from the horses and enjoy bagpipe music, a Native American dance troupe, and dog obedience and clicker training demonstrations. Nearly every farm will offer refreshments, and a number will have vendors onsite for visitors who want to do a little shopping.

Many stables will have young foals to enjoy. Visitors will be able to view horses offered for sale and stallions available for breeding. One farm will even invite visitors to line dance with their Paint stallion.

Breeds of horses range from popular thoroughbreds, paints, and quarter horses to the more unusual American Miniature horses, Clydesdales, Percherons, and European warmbloods.

Complete information on the farms, including maps and directions, will be featured in the March/April issue of Pennsylvania Equestrian, a bimonthly newspaper for and about Pennsylvania's horse industry, and on the world wide web at www.horseshow.com.

The Open House is free. For more information, call (717) 898-5874.

The following stables are among those who will participate in the 2000 Horse Farms Open House.

Bucks County

• Beau Chevaux, 90 Eagle Rd., Newton, PA 18940. (215) 860-3525 or (215) 639-9119. Cutting horses, hunter/jumpers, Quarter horses. Boarding, lessons.

• Dancing Star Equestrian Center, across the street from 1261 Slotter Rd., Bedminster/Perkasie, PA 18944. (215) 795-0264. Dressage, warmbloods.

• Horses LTD., 374 Worthington Mill Rd., Richboro, PA 18954. (215) 968-8841. Hunter/jumpers, lessons, training, sales.

• Mile View Farm, 1355 Ferry Rd., Doylestown, PA 18901. (215) 489-0115. Dressage, hunter/jumpers, driving, lessons, training, boarding.

• My Dream Farm, 1805 Allentown Rd., Quakertown, PA 18951. (215) 529-7384. www.mydreamfarm.com. American Miniature Horses, breeding, sales.

ADADC Mid East Board

COLUMBUS, Ohio—The American Dairy Association & Dairy Council Mid East board of trustees elected its 2000 officers.

Re-elected for a second term, Paul Broering, from St. Henry in Mercer County, Ohio, will continue as president in 2000. "It is

"The organization has been very helpful in advising me in my heifer raising practices," said Saber. "The members who belong to PDHGA are a quality group of people. We can share ideas and experiences from our operations."

Saber offers the following advice to farmers who are raising heifers for themselves or other dairy producers.

"Make sure you can feed a total mixed ration so that the heifers get the right balance of nutrients," said Saber. "Also, you don't want too many sources for your calves. Make sure you screen your customers because if one farm brings in sick calves, then they're all sick."

"Maintain a good vaccination program," said Saber. "And don't limit yourself to just Holsteins. I raised some Jerseys last year, and they adjusted well to my operation."

Reading/Northern

Lancaster County Area

• Foxfield Farm, 230 Holtzman Rd., Reinholds, PA 17569. (717) 484-2250. Thoroughbreds, warmbloods, dressage, eventing, hunter/jumper. Lessons, training, boarding.

• Heron Mead Farm, 4903 Penn Ave., Sinking Spring, PA 19608. (610) 678-6876. Thoroughbreds, dressage and eventing. Lessons, training, boarding.

Northwest Lancaster/

Lebanon/Dauphin/Perry Area

• BarKay Stables, RD 3 Box 360, Lawn Rd., Manheim, PA 17545. (717) 665-2009. Lessons, trail riding lessons, boarding.

• Double D Stables, 1265 Mapledale Rd., Elizabethtown, PA 17022. (717) 367-2053. www.doubledstables.com. American Paint Horses, breeding, sales.

• Windy Ridge Farm/Outlaw Stables, RR 5 Box 595, Newport, PA 17074. (717) 444-2555. Thoroughbreds, Clydesdales, Thoroughdales, ponies, hunter/jumper, equitation. Trail rides, lessons, wagon rides, training, lessons.

York Area

• Lauxmont Farms Equestrian Center, 1215 Long Level Rd., Wrightsville, PA 17368. (717) 252-9870. Boarding, hunt seat, dressage, and equitation lessons, training, breed thoroughbreds.

• Lost & Found Horse Rescue, 852 Valley Rd., York, PA 17403. (717) 428-9701. Emergency stabling, rehabilitation and adoption services for abused, neglected, and discarded equines.

an honor to be elected again to serve my fellow dairy farmers and represent their best interests in the area of dairy promotion," Broering says. "The check-off program strives to increase the demand for dairy products—and it's doing just that. Last year, total milk sales increased 3.1 percent!"

Newly elected officers include Merle Chaplin, Moundsville, W.Va., vice president; and Connie Finton, New Philadelphia, Ohio, secretary. Also returning for another term as treasurer is Alice Moore, Frazeyburg, Ohio. All officers have been elected to serve one-year terms.