

Berks County Dairy Farmer Crossbreeds To Prepare For Changes

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milk through her system," he said. "We need cows who convert forage into milk efficiently."

Stoltzfus feeds his herd mainly high-quality forages, including round bale baleage. The cows are fed grain through a computerized feeder system.

Although Stoltzfus' Normandy crosses are still calves, he can already see some benefits of having them. "The first thing you notice is that these calves eat hay," he said. "A calf is born with two things in mind — getting on their feet and finding something to eat. The Normandy calves are very hardy."

Stoltzfus first found out about the Normandy dairy breed when his own visited a booth at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin.

"There were a lot of reasons I liked the breed," said Stoltzfus. "They average 4.5 percent fat and 4.0 percent protein. Their milk production averages around 15,000 pounds, but they can produce that with forage."

Another aspect of the breed

that Stoltzfus liked was its longevity. "The Normandy breed averages eight to nine lactations, compared to other more traditional breeds that are averaging between two and four lactations."

Stoltzfus has had eight or nine calves born as Normandy - Holstein crosses. But only three of them were heifers. He only knows of one other farmer in the area who owns any Normandy animals, and those are also calves.

"The only Normandys milking in the states are beef and Normandy crosses," said Stoltzfus. "The dairy strand is still relatively new."

This is the first time that Stoltzfus has experimented with crossbreeding and with non-traditional dairy breeds.

"The Normandy breed has a terrific young sire program," said Stoltzfus. "They have a good sampling of young sires with better records than we do here in the states."

So far Stoltzfus is pleased with his Normandy calves. However, he said he can't be sure how much they will benefit the

herd until they become cows.

"If you don't experiment and try new things, you're foolish," said Stoltzfus. "But then, if you do and it doesn't work, people will call you a fool. So you just have to go with your instincts."

Stoltzfus is hoping that his Normandy crossbreeds will help increase his component levels so that he is prepared for component pricing.

"It used to be that people didn't want high component levels and that the dairies took a lot of the components out of the milk," said Stoltzfus. "But now that trend is changing."

In Stoltzfus' opinion, fluid milk consumption has dropped during the past 20 years because the components that flavor the milk just weren't there any more.

"When we had all Guernsey, we used to have people come to our farm to get milk because it tasted better than store-bought milk," said Stoltzfus' wife Ruth. "Milk just doesn't taste as good with lower components."

Stoltzfus also believes that milk made with forage is more healthful than milk made by

cows that are fed a lot of concentrates.

"A few weeks ago I read that conjugated linolenic acids or CLAs (fatty acids that are found in milk) can prevent against cancer, and that those CLAs are more prevalent in milk made with forage," said Stoltzfus. "I also heard that European butter (which is made from milk produced by cows fed primarily forage) has less saturated fats than butter made in America. Milk made with forage can be almost pharmaceutical."

Reading this information started Stoltzfus thinking. "I always knew that too much grain led to too many problems," said Stoltzfus, who claims he has very few twisted stomachs in his herd because of feeding forage. "A cow wasn't met to consume high levels of grain. She is a forage converter."

According to Stoltzfus, pro-

ducing milk with forage is definitely to the average-sized farmer's advantage.

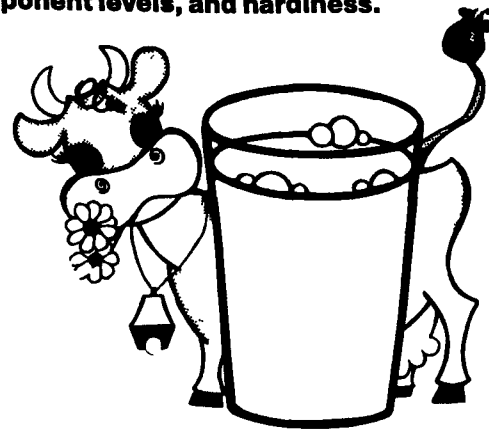
"The larger dairies have trouble raising enough forage to feed high amounts of it to their herd," said Stoltzfus. "But the smaller dairies can raise it on their own ground."

Stoltzfus predicts that some day the component levels in milk will be a major issue. "I didn't see any significant changes in my milk check when they converted to the new pricing system," said Stoltzfus. "But I do think they're moving in that direction (of paying more for high component levels)."

Stoltzfus claims that too many consumers believe milk is fat. "If we want to increase per capita consumption, we're going to have to put the components back into the milk and sell the consumer on the idea that milk is protein."



Looking like an overly-speckled Holstein, the Normandy dairy cow originated from France and touts longevity, high milk component levels, and hardiness.



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