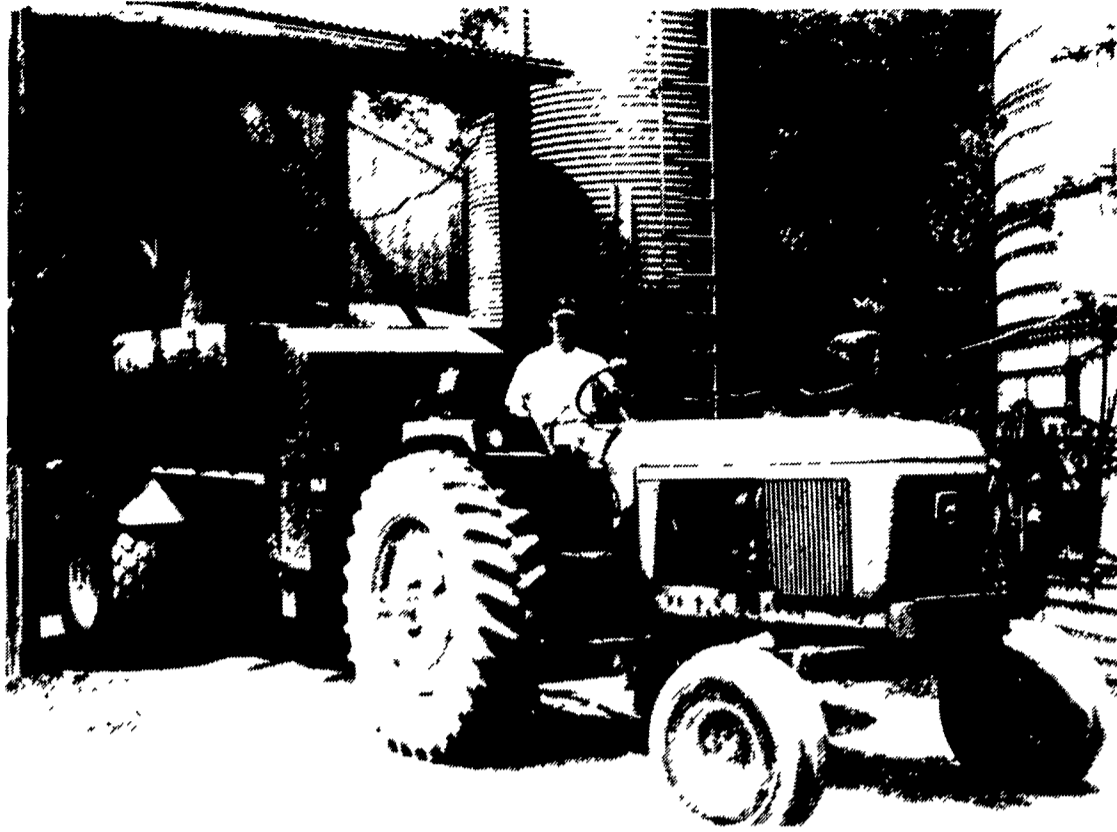


No Time for Boredom at Stuck Farm



Dave Stuck adds corn and protein supplement into the TMR Mixer outside of the freestall barn at Plum Bottom. The free-stall barn has 288 stalls and Stuck plans to be up to capacity soon.

GAIL STROCK

Mifflin Co. Correspondent
BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.) - "It must be something you really can't help. It's got to be a sickness," joked Dave Stuck of Belleville, Mifflin County, when asked why he dairy farms.

Not raised on a farm, Stuck went from milking zero to 190 cows in twelve short years and plans to add about 100 more. He thrives on the challenge of doing more.

The dream of dairy farming began with Dave's father, Barry. Dave worked on several farms throughout high school and college. He and his parents formed a partnership after Dave graduated from Penn State with an Ag Science degree.

They started farming in 1989 with 45 cows while renting the Heide Farm, owned by the Hayes family, on the Back Mountain Road between Belleville and Reedsville.

"Dad and I worked our way up to 60 cows, then 80. It was obvious that the more cows we'd have, the easier it'd be financially," said Stuck.

Dave and his wife, Jennifer, and daughters, Julia, 4, and Laura, 1, still live on Heide Farm, although Dave's herd outgrew the facilities by 1997.

They then moved their dairy operation next door to Plum Bottom Farm, owned by the Rodgers family, and bought 100 more cattle.

Stuck rents the large dairy facility at Plum Bottom, including 600 tillable acres and 75 acres pasture. The partnership owns 80 acres. He plants 350 acres of corn, 150 acres of soybeans, and 180 of an alfalfa and grass mix. Dave's goal is to increase the herd to nearly 300.

Although beginning as a dream, the reality of dairy farming for the Stucks hinges on the bottom line. "Regardless of how well we love what we do, we have to make a profit. The cows are the variable," said Stuck. "Our land, feed, and buildings are fixed. We make a profit per cow, so we're adding more cows."

"Once we decided to expand, we researched the cost of building a new facility for 200 cows. We couldn't cash flow it. It would have taken 400 cows, and we didn't want to go that far yet," he said. "The money it cost us to retrofit the parlor into a double-six herringbone with automatic take-offs at Plum Bottom is relatively inexpensive compared to building a brand new parlor. Plum Bottom's freestall barn is set up for 288

cows. We're remodeling the entire barn for cow comfort. I firmly believe in a stall for every cow."

Stuck depends upon three full-time milkers, Teretha Kanagy, Carolyn Loucks, and Dale Williamson. One person milks per shift at 5 a.m., 1 p.m., and 9 p.m. Doug Miller of Belleville serves as crop manager and field man.

Galen Kenepf feeds calves on weekends. Dave's father feeds calves weekday mornings, while Jennifer feeds calves weekday afternoons. Dave's parents keep the books and write the checks, while Dave handles the day-to-day management.

"It takes 5 hours for each person to milk, clean up, scrub the parlor - to do any-

thing that keeps the milk inspectors happy. On a bad day, the parlor barely stops," Dave said. "I feed the cows 99% of the time, bring the cows to the parlor two out of three milkings, scrape the manure, do herd checks, and simple vet work - administer calcium and dextrose IVs - in the parlor during milking."

"We aren't too speedy. Everything that happens during

each milking is recorded - when milking started, any medications administered, fresh dates, amount of milk, temperature of milk to make sure the compressor is working - everything."

"We run a very simple operation. If you find a problem, correct it. If a cow's sick, make her better. If she's dead, drag her out," said Stuck. "No one told me how to do things. I read a lot and visited a lot of farms to learn. We just do what's best for us. One thing we do differently is not using artificial insemination. I know the AI genetics is much better than the bulls I have, but detecting cows in heat and getting them serviced requires a lot of labor and time. Our cows breed. We have no problem with cows not settling. It's our biggest key to making milk constantly."

Stuck's DHIA records show a herd average pushing 24,000. He maintains a 25% cull rate. Dave admits that his farm right now is caught between being a large family farm and a smaller large-herd production operation.

"We're at that in-between stage. I have to manage people and still do my share of the workload," said Stuck. "But I can't micromanage every detail. That's why it's so important to communicate with employees about everything that happens in the milking parlor."

"I keep focused on the di-

rection the farm is going and rely on input from all employees. The management of people is getting easier," he said. "It's hard going from a doer to a manager, especially when you're working right along with them. I quickly learned to be decisive. Explain how you want it done and encourage them to do it that way."

Dave's goal of owning his own farm is slowly becoming a reality. In 1995, his parents purchased a 33-acre neighboring farm and currently live there.

Barry continues to work full-time off the farm as an accountant, and Dave's mother Jean works as a medical transcriptionist. The partnership purchased 80 acres of land near Heide Farm in 1996. And, all the while, Dave's wishing for what every dairy farmer is wishing for - better milk prices.

"I'd be a much better interviewer if the price of milk were up," he added with a laugh. "If I could buy a farm and support my family with just 50 cows I would. I didn't set out to get this large. But the nice thing about growing in size is you don't have to be there seven days a week."

"As a manager, you do have to live with the decisions you make. Ambition is what drives you. If you like what your doing, and you want to succeed, and no one's telling you differently, then you're succeeding."

*Dairy Trends In
Pennsylvania's Top
Producing Counties.*
June Dairy Issue Special
FRANKLIN

Franklin County Cow Numbers Up From 20 Years Ago

Phil Wagner

Franklin Co. Dairy Ext. Agent

The trends occurring in dairying in Franklin County, Pennsylvania's number two dairy county, mirror those occurring in other major dairy counties in the United States.

Farm numbers continue to decline, and many of those remaining in the business are increasing in cow numbers. The dairy cow population continues to hover around 45,000 cows. Twenty years ago cow numbers stood at 37,000. Average herd size is 100 cows.

Building of new dairy facilities, especially freestall barns, continues at a rapid pace. Many 1970's vintage cow housing facilities are fully depreciated and out-dated when it comes to cow comfort, cow handling, and ease of feeding. Many are placing a new freestall barn at an ideal site and walking the cows to an existing parlor that is still fairly efficient. A new parlor may be part of the future at some of these dairies.

Specialization is occurring more each year, especially in the areas of contract heifer raising and custom planting, harvesting, and manure handling. As farms increase in cow num-

bers more feed is being purchased.

This includes grams, Western hay, and silage purchased on contract from neighbors. More corn silage and less hay crop silage is being fed each year as cow numbers increase. The land base is shrinking due to pressures from both expanding dairies and residential/industrial development.

The county has a group of purebred dairy cattle breeders that have been capitalizing on the opportunities available with marketing dairy genetics. This has provided increased income without the necessity of major facility additions and significant increase in cow numbers. Another segment of producers have successfully transitioned to intensive rotational grazing as a means of cost and investment control.

As herd size continues to increase, key areas of focus have become people management, marketing issues, and environmental concerns. As long as dairy remains a viable industry in Pennsylvania, Franklin County will continue to be a key player.

Dairyalea Cooperative Supports Changes

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Dairyalea Cooperative Inc. supports changes to the formulas for Class III and Class IV that were proposed by the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) at the recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) hearing in Alexandria, Virginia.

"The make allowance issue is important to farmers and manufacturers alike," said Edward Gallagher, Vice President of Planning and Regulatory Policy for Dairyalea. "Unfortunately, in Federal Order Reform's implementation, the USDA excessively raised make allowances which lowered Class III and blended prices to dairy farmers."

Dairyalea and other major dairy cooperatives worked with the NMPF in developing a proposal, which, if adopted, would

increase blended milk prices in the Northeast by 5¢ to 10¢ per hundredweight. Changes to the current pricing system for cheese and butter/powder products, which were presented by the NMPF at last week's hearing, include:

- Updating the current milk manufacturing cost allowance for cheeses, butter and nonfat dry milk by replacing the USDA's outdated Rural Business Cooperative Service (RBCS) data and the California dairy product manufacturing cost surveys, with the most recent manufacturing cost data from those two surveys;

- Absent current whey manufacturing cost data in the RBCS and California surveys, determining the whey manufacturing cost allowance by using the non-

fat dry milk make allowance plus approximately one cent per pound to reflect the higher costs incurred in drying whey; and

- Establishing the Class IV butterfat price by deducting approximately 6¢ per pound from the butterfat price, using a formula that does not impact producer revenue from other classes.

"This balanced approach takes into account the dairy farmers' need to have a fairer formula to determine Class III prices, but it also recognizes the importance of cheese manufacturers to the livelihood of dairy farmers," Gallagher said.

The USDA is not expected to issue a final decision until the end of the year.