

Project Grass And Partners Work Together To Improve Animal Humanity

FREEPORT (Armstrong Co.) — On June 6, a crowd of 52 people attended a Project Grass Pasture Walk on Joseph King's dairy farm. The Project Grass Field Day and Pasture Walk demonstrated how the combined efforts of agencies and farmers does improve animal economics and welfare. By moving the animals out of the barn and out onto pasture, a producer experiences better economics, less labor, and better animal health benefits.

Joe King, Bellefonte is currently milking 72 Holstein cows with a herd production of 20,000 pounds per year. King has converted a farm that had six acres of pasture and 105 acres of cropland to 40 acres of pasture and

71 acres of cropland. Little Fishing Creek, a tributary stream of the Bald Eagle, runs through King's pasture. The stream is now fenced limiting cow access to the stream which benefits both the water quality and the cow's health.

King called the Centre County Conservation District looking for technical assistance to establish a grazing system on his farm. He signed up with the Project Grass program, and the Centre County Conservation District applied for the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation/Western Pennsylvania Watershed Protection Program's Grant on King's behalf seeking cost-share money to install the grazing system.

JB Harrold, NRCS and Project Grass coordinator, designed the rotational grazing system. Penn's Corner Conservancy obtained the funding through the Laurel Grant. Beth Hirt, Centre County Conservation District wrote and submitted for a grant and developed King's nutrient management plan. King used his grant money to install all fence for the grazing system and to install waterlines and troughs.

Burrell Whitworth and Greg Boyd of the NRCS office in Clinton/Centre Counties provided technical support with the installation of the grazing paddocks and submitted an EQIP application for King to increase the financial support to further develop the best management practices on his farm.

King used the EQIP money to install a stream crossing and a spring development to supply adequate clean water source for the cows.

A combination of support from Project Grass, NRCS, Centre Count Conservation District, Penns Corner Conservancy helped Joe King convert a farm with erodable corn acres into permanent grass. This conversation helps to eliminate the soil erosion problem along streambanks by establishing grass and riparian plants. The installation of the streambank fence also helps the wildlife habitat.

Project Grass will give producers free consultation on their farms. Contact your County Conservation District for more information.

Economics Drive Franklin County Farmer To Expand

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sion. "No matter what you do, your costs are going to overrun what you thought," said Doug. "We saw overruns of 10 to 15% for the parlor, mainly because we worked with three to four different people to build it. The freestall barn stayed on budget because we only worked with one person who built it."

One of the biggest challenges in expanding is getting the animals used to the new facilities. "People told me that our production would fall, but it didn't," said Doug. "We had people in that night who were really impressed with how well it went."

The McCullohs only saw a drop in production for about two weeks. "The new parlor is much cooler and more open than before when we were milking in a 12-stall stantion barn," said Greg.

Now it takes less time to milk 220 cows in the new parlor than it did to milk 120 cows in the stantion barn.

"We milk three times a day compared to two times a day in the old barn," said Doug. "And we spend maybe only an hour more milking three times now than we did milking two times in the old barn."

When the McCullohs expanded, they built a separate freestall barn to lower the amount of time that cows are standing in the holding area.

"Our cows are standing in the holding area for at most an hour and half," said Doug. "Before they were standing two to three hours."

According to Doug, when you expand, your cash flow improves because your unit costs are reduced. "You can handle problems more," he said. "But you have to be willing to milk that many cows."

On the expanded operation, Doug and Greg have divvied out management responsibilities. Doug handles the crops and machinery maintenance while Greg handles herd management.

"It's very unusual for a young

man Greg's age to be interested in cows," said Doug. "Most younger guys are only intersted in the crops."

A fourth generation farm, the McCullohs' operation employs four part-time milkers in addition to Doug and Greg. "The nice thing about part-time employees is that you can get someone who is a really good worker but who might not want to work a lot of hours."

According to the McCullohs, labor becomes more of a challenge as a dairy expands. "When you're small, you can't take off because you don't have extra help," said Doug. "But, when you expand, if someone doesn't show, you're the one left filling in."

The McCullohs depend on advice from their nutritionist, veterinarian, and banker to manage their operation. "Those three people are very important to us," said Doug. "We need to have people who are on track and can give us good ideas."

Doug's wife Barbara helped on the farm until two years ago when she returned to college to become a registered nurse. Now she works at Quincy United Methodist Church. Their 19-year-old daughter, Kristin, works at the Washington County Hospital and goes to school in Hagerstown, Md. Seven-year-old Brian likes to help out on the farm.

Although the McCullohs are content with the number of cows they have now, they haven't ruled out future expansions.

"If Brian decides to join the operation, we want to be able to include him. We could add on another 100 stalls to the new barn, and we have enough feed now that we could do it," said Doug. "With the acres we have, cow numbers aren't a problem." Even with depressed milk prices and other disgruntled farmers, the McCullohs are positive about their current operation and the expansion.

"I am glad we are where we're at now instead of where we were," said Doug. "It was harder at 120 cows than it is at 220."



"Mattie," Joe King's Holstein cow, J.B. Harold Project Grass Coordinator Beth Hirt Centre County Conservation District and 52 people attended the Project Grass Pasture Walk at Joe King's Dairy farm, Bellefont.

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