

Graziers Learn 'Maximum Management' Techniques At Conference

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fours and 15-gallon barrels.

The boards are spliced and bolted to the barrel, then the fence is pulled along on barrels twice a day. Ropes hook to the corners, middle, and back in four places to allow movement in all directions.

"The calves line up at the front and walk along because they know they're moving on to fresh grass and grain," explained Strite. A lead wire attached to the fence makes the polywire hot and keeps the calves in check. "It's all very portable," he said.

Laneway construction consists of geotextile fabric with a layer of stones or lime, spread with a manure spreader, over top. Shingle tabs are ideal, he said, but are also hard to purchase because of high demand.

The Strites milk 90 cows and work two farms with a total of 300 acres. Approximately 170 of the acres are in grass, with the rest in woods.

The Forgey Farm

Dave Forgey milks 130 New Zealand Holstein-Friesian cross cattle on his seasonal grazing operation in Logansport, Ind. An experienced grazer, Forgey's land has been in grass for ten years.

After hearing about rotational grazing, his interest was piqued and he went on to learn about putting the land into grass. He attributes grass farming as the factor that saved his operation from debt and kept Forgey in the dairy business.

"This kind of a system, if you've been at it at all, takes a mindset change. It can't be done from the seat of a tractor or from the office," he said.

Watching costs is key, emphasized Forgey. "You need to know the cost of production to realize the advantages of grazing. Cost control is the easiest way to profit.

"Get out of the old mode of spending money you don't have to," he said.

"Question every expense; make sure it's a justifiable cost. Most of our inputs are lime and seed. Beyond that there's not much added to the farm.

"People are willing to look at new technology rather than a new system," he said. "Step outside the box. Put profit per unit over production per unit."

In conclusion, Forgey said, "the dairy industry is rapidly changing. Pasture systems provide a way to stay competitive today."

Hertzler's Moo-Echo Farm Duane Hertzler, Loysville, owns 300 acres and rents 300 acres for Moo-Echo farm, with 270 acres in grass. The rented acreage yields corn silage and alfalfa haylage for the operation.

Hertzler purchased his Perry County farm in 1978 and built an 80-cow freestall barn. In 1993, the Hertzler family started looking at opportunities to become more profitable.

By then they were farming 1,000 acres, putting in 16-hour days, dealing with herd health problems, high somatic cell counts, and considering equipment replacement.

After they visited a grazing operation in December of 1993, the Hertzlers were convinced of the potential of farming on a

grass-based operation. They began implementing their own grassland operation almost immediately and were ready to graze by April.

Since then, they have met goals such as buying less protein, feeding less grain, lowering the somatic cell count, improving herd health and reproduction, identifying heat detection more easily, decreasing cull rate, and enjoying a less stressful workday.

"We found that farming was less of a science and more of an art," said Hertzler.

Ken King, Kansas

Kenneth King, Hutchinson, Kansas, milks 75 head of cattle and owns 300 acres, 300 of which are in grass. Erosion

problems on the Kansas plain helped to lead to the grassland operation.

"Have you ever told your kids, 'stop dreaming and get to work?'" he asked. "Have you ever spent a day helping your kids fulfill their dreams?"

"I propose that when we develop our children's hands — which develop on their own anyway — instead of developing their minds — which takes creative attention to develop — then we lose out on a wonderful opportunity and resource.

"For too long in my life I've used my hands, scooping feed. It was when I spent time on the fence posts, observing my cows, that my life changed.

"I'm not downplaying or criticizing working with your hands," he said. But working

with your hands comes naturally, and you have got to cultivate your mind, whether yours, or your children's, or your employees'.

"You don't need to produce more than your neighbor to be competitive, you just have to produce more efficiently, or have a better marketing strategy."

Spend time trying to optimize, he said, and consider your resources, such as land, cattle, or customers. Even problems can be resources, as problems can be turned into assets. "The only limiting factor to resources is our minds," he said.

Look for a full report of the Southeast Pennsylvania Grazing Conference in the next issue of Lancaster Farming's "Foraging Around" supplement.

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