



Calves and heifers have access to pasture from a very young age. Milking cows have access to pasture from mid-April through October.

Seeleys' Milky Way Farm

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They milk between 40 and 85 cows year-round, but have begun to selectively breed to have the largest number of milkers in the spring, summer, and fall.

Their pursuit of a fine-tuned grazing operation has also led them on a quest to find a better cow.

"We have crossbred seven breeds into the herd now," said Seeley.

The mixture includes Holstein, Jersey, Dutch Belted, Milking Shorthorn, Brown Swiss, Ayrshire, and Lineback bloodlines. They started cross-breeding their Holstein herd about nine years ago.

"We're trying to breed a tougher animal for the northern climate that needs less maintenance," he said.

In retrospect, Seeley says he would have modified his breeding strategy by using bulls two years instead of one.

"We could have extended out the breeding for 14 years, because now we've almost gone through all the breeds, so we're ready to come back around."

In the next few years, they might cross in some European breeds, leaning more to the dual-purpose breeds.

Besides breeding a tougher cow, the Seeleys have also noticed a change in their milk flavor.

"Milk flavor is not just a function of quantity, it's also a function of other things," said Seeley. "Those other breeds all bring something into that milk component structure. Now we're starting to see a difference in the flavor of the milk."

Besides operating a juggling operation, making their own ice cream and supplying several area stores, the Bradford County correctional facility and Penn College with milk, the Seeleys have also begun to market cheeses under their "Armenia Mountain" label.

"The cheesemaker always says that our milk behaves strangely," said Seeley. "And you've got to expect that."

The milk is tested monthly for quality because of the juggling operation. This spring they plan to begin testing for conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and essential fatty acids.

"Those are really the most exciting part of the grass-fed movement right now," said Seeley. "The health implications of those components

are overwhelming."

The benefits of grazing can be debated on the financial front as well.

"The biggest thing grazing has enabled us to do is recoup our depreciation. We've been able to upgrade the equipment that we need; a new round baler, a new manure spreader, a new tractor. We haven't made a lot of actual cash out of



In search of a tougher cow, the Seeleys have been cross breeding for about nine years. These two calves are products of a Lineback bull.

pocket, but we've been able to keep our buildings modern and looking good," said Seeley. "For the past 25 years that's the biggest thing going on in agriculture. Everybody's buildings are going downhill because they're spending everything they have to do day-to-day things."

Perhaps the biggest change the Seeleys have seen is not in cash flow or crossbreeding or making the transition to pasture, but in the quality of life — for people and cows.

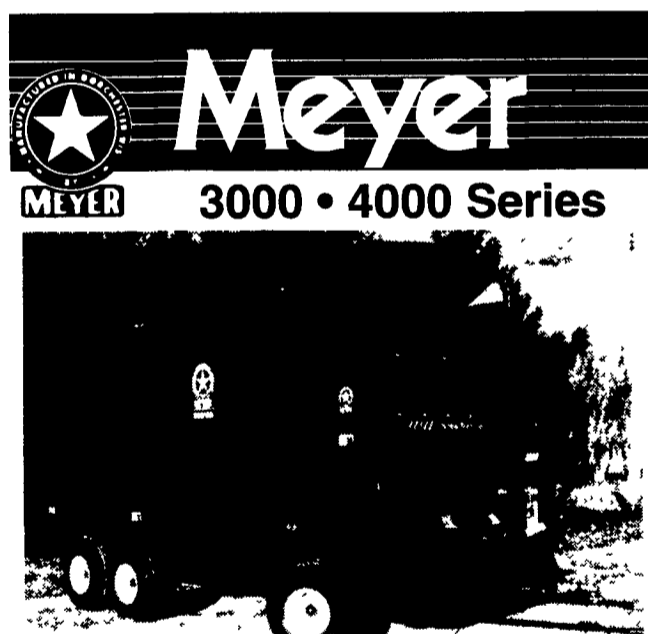
"The quality of life has definitely changed when we went from conventional to grazing. We're still only six months of grazing, because of the weather, but it's just that six months that you need to change your mindset and it's something to look forward to."

Right now they are looking at ways to improve cow comfort during the winter months as well.

"We plan to maintain half of the

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