

Thomson Farm

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cows in there right now, and (Keith's) probably going to buy about 30 more."

Ventilation was a key issue in building the barn.

"We built this type of barn because we love the 14-foot-high sides for ventilation," said Bob, who explained that curtains on all sides of the barn allow for constant air movement.

"We wanted a cold barn," said Bob.

At milking time, cows exit the barn and walk down a covered path to the parlor.

"We put in steps and have no more than a five percent slope in the walkway," noted Keith.

They expanded their milking parlor from a double-six to a double-nine to increase milking efficiency. In the future they hope to build a new parlor directly behind the new freestall barn.

"We have a little over 20,000 pound herd average," said Bob Thomson, who also serves as a director for Dairy Farmers of America.

Their last test revealed 20,159 pounds of milk, 732 pounds of fat, and 619 pounds of protein on twice-a-day milking.

"We just put in another tank in because they were picking us up two times a day. Now we have capacity for 7,000 gallons of milk," said Bob.

Even though careful thought was put into every aspect of the expansion, there are still unforeseeable difficulties.

"No matter how well you plan, you still have glitches," said Bob, who admits that some things could be better managed. Right now he explains that they have a lot of calves that are weaned and too big for their calf barn, but they have no other place to put them.

"We have calves everywhere," said Bob, who noted that they are thinking of contracting some out to a local grower.

Because there are no headgates in the freestall area, Keith is also building a parturition rail, where the cows can walk in single file just as they do in the parlor, for breeding and herd health checks.

Before building, they read an article that said it would take about a year and a half to have everything operational and to realize the potential. Though they did not believe that then, they now see that it can take a long time for everything to fall in place.

"We've really been operating the way we should be for only five months," said Bob.

Olive, who does the majority of the bookwork, is excited about new technology that will help streamline efforts.

"We bought a Palm Pilot. When Keith goes around the barn, he'll be able to enter information such as breeding dates and calving dates, and then he'll be able to bring it in here and download the information right into the computer," said Olive.

Another strategy the Thomsons use is forward contracting a percentage of their milk. Olive points out that as long as you contract at a price that is above your expenses, you really can't lose. "It all evens out," she said. "It gives us stability."

"Whether you use it or not, everybody needs to be knowledgeable about it," said Bob, who

promotes risk management strategies through his work in DFA.

Bob and Olive are proud of their accomplishments but are equally proud of their sons, including Keith, who continues the farming tradition, and Clay, Nelson, and Robert, who have off-farm jobs.

For estate planning purposes, they have a family partnership which includes Bob, Olive, and their four sons.

"This is just for the land. We have it set up that we'll gift them the maximum each year, but we'll still keep 51 percent."

"Essentially it's owned by the six of us," noted Olive. "Then they can figure out what they want to do with it when we're not here."

Said Bob, "There is an agreement that nobody can sell without the agreement of all four."

Keith rents the land from the partnership and has purchased additional cows. Some cows are still registered in Bob's name and the partnership, and of course, Keith's two sons and Bob and Olive's other grandchildren each have calves to show.

The brothers haven't forgotten the farm either. Last fall, while working to replace a wall panel in the barn during a windstorm, Keith was seriously injured. The situation was further compounded because Bob was scheduled to have a knee operation.

"When their brother (Keith) got hurt last fall, without even talking to us, they got together and said one or more of us will come up every weekend," said Bob. "They helped until he got back on his feet again."

Their wives Traci, Andrea, Mary and Jo-Ellen and children also came along to help when possible.

They also cannot say enough about their hired help — Ronnie Bishop and Lyle Yates — who do fieldwork and other farm work, and Dawn Stump, who is the calf feeder.

Now they also employ two Mexican workers through Dairy Farmers of America.

"That labor really helped a lot," said Olive, who added that having additional milkers gives Keith more free time to manage the farm as a whole.

The Thomsons are comfortable about their decision to expand the dairy and are confident that their larger size will give them money-saving advantages, such as being able to buy feed in bulk.

Bob also points out that there's no one right way to run a farm.

"Everything isn't for everybody," said Bob. "When it's all said and done, we're very ordinary dairy farmers."

Northeast Order Uniform Milk Price For April 2001 Announced

BOSTON, Mass. — The statistical uniform price paid by milk dealers (handlers) regulated under the Northeast Order for April 2001 is \$15.24 per hundredweight (\$1.31 per gallon) for milk delivered to plants located in Suffolk County, Mass. (Boston). The April statistical uniform price is \$15.14 for delivery to plants in New York, N.Y., and \$15.04 for delivery to plants in Philadelphia.

The statistical uniform price is the benchmark minimum pro-

ducer blend price paid to dairy farmers, prior to allowable deductions, for milk containing 3.5 percent butterfat, 2.99 percent protein, and 5.69 percent other solids. The price received by an individual dairy farmer will vary as the component composition of a farm's milk differs from the established benchmarks and by the location of the plant(s) to which the farm's milk is delivered.

The Class prices for milk pooled in April are as follows: Class I, \$16.69 (Suffolk County,

Mass.); Class II, \$15.10; Class III, \$12.06; and Class IV, \$14.41. Comparable prices for April 2000 were: Class I \$14.18, Class II \$12.10, Class III \$9.41, and Class IV price \$11.38. The component values for April are protein, \$1.5443 per pound; butterfat, \$1.9483 per pound; other solids, \$0.1081 per pound; and nonfat solids, \$0.8745 per pound.

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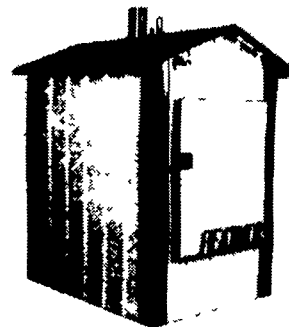
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