

Labor, Expansion

(Continued from Page 14)

He said, "Fill the barn with good quality heifers and keep it full."

Zimmerman noted that they were looking at an old stantion barn. The old operation was a 40-cow stall barn with 80 cows milking. "This was very time-consuming and very tiring on the knees," he said. "We were looking to switch."

The Zimmermans looked at feasibility studies. The first study looked at a 300-cow operation, but with those numbers, "it looked like we would be better off if we had no expansion at all," he said, to accommodate the working families. So they opted for 60 cows.

His daughter left a landscape nursery operation to run the milking parlor. His son James received an automotive inspection certificate from Harrisburg Area Community College but returned to the farm.

James is in charge of feeding and maintenance and has "never milked a cow yet," said Zimmerman. "Everybody has their own section, and knows how to do their job."

David noted how important it was to do an expansion study and plan it out before you start. "Take a video camera along," he said, "to look at

expansion." The video camera looked at lighting and other things. "The little things in an expansion make a big difference," he said.

The 600-head dairy utilized half cows and heifers. The heifers were already purchased from a heifer-raiser before expansion.

Zimmerman noted that the holding areas for the cows are only half slatted. "We should have put full slats in," he said. "That's one of the things we should have done differently."

Mike Brubaker, who expanded the dairy operation about 10 years ago, was milking 100 cows each on two farms. Each location had 42 tiestalls. There was a lack of cow comfort, two sets of labor, feed storage, and milking equipment to manage, and other issues.

Both Tony and Mike, out of college, enjoyed the farm life and dairying. But several issues were critical to them if they expanded: cow comfort, labor, and improved production. With three-times-a-day milking, feed storage and equipment access were critical.

"We're glad we expanded," he said, noting that managing the labor and other issues "allowed us more quality time."

The best thing they accomplished: figuring out
(Turn to Page A16)

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