

Chester County Holstein Enthusiasts Tour Lebanon Tiestall Operations

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Lancaster Farming Staff

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — In Lebanon County, the number of dairy farms with tiestall barns seems relatively high compared to some other areas. In many parts of Pennsylvania and the rest of the country, freestall operations are a more common sight.

Some people might think this is because Lebanon County dairy producers are behind the times or even stubborn about making changes.

Farmers here would say the opposite. Scott and Karen Nolt, for example, recently built a new barn with 80 tiestalls alongside the 100-stall barn that Scott's parents, Allen and Carol, built in 1996. For the Nolt family, tiestalls are part of a progressive management program that includes good cow care and high production.

The Nolt's Country Path Farm was one of four farm stops in the south Lebanon area for a busload of Chester County Holstein Club members on their annual Holstein tour March 14.

Scott Nolt is the fourth generation on the farm, previously owned by his mother Carol

(Ziegler) Nolt's parents and grandparents. Scott and Karen are now managing the dairy herd while Allen takes care of most of the fieldwork. The family raises most of the forages for the cows and replacement stock on the 125-acre home farm along with some rented land.

The Nolt family, along with two fulltime hired men and some part-time help, are milking 170 cows four times a day (4X) in this setup. With a rolling herd average of 30,856 pounds of milk, 1,064 of fat, and 924 of protein, they believe it's working for them.

"I like the individual attention (to the cows) and not having to work with the manure so much," Scott said on why he chose tiestalls over a freestall/parlor operation.

The new stalls are bedded with sand spread on top of rubber "sand traps" — tire strips cut 4 inches wide and packed on edge in the stalls to help reduce the amount of sand needed. Curbs at the rear of the stall also help save sand from being pushed back into the gutter.

Sand is blown into the stalls every four or five days with a blower attachment on a skid

loader. "In five minutes, I have the barn bedded up," Scott said.

Since they started using sand for bedding, the Nolts have had to treat very few cows for mastitis, and have seen their somatic cell counts drop to an average of 120,000 or lower. They are so impressed with the performance that they have begun to replace with sand the cow mats installed less than two years ago in the 1996 barn.

An abundance of good help on the farm, plus an openness to new ideas, made Scott first decide to try 4X milking a little less than two months ago. Since then, the cows have increased their milk production eight pounds per cow per day to about 110 pounds on average.

The Nolts treat their cows with BST hormone to boost production. The 4X milking, besides helping to maximize milk output, should promote cow longevity, according to Scott.

"If you milk them more often, you're helping to support the udders," he said.

The herd is milked in six-hour intervals at 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m., and 10 p.m. With two people running 10 automatic-take-



Scott Nolt, left, talks to Chester County visitors about the tiestall setup.

off milkers, each milking takes about two and half hours.

"People say I'm crazy," Scott said, of choosing to milk four times a day. "But I'm not trying to prove anything."

"The help is everything. We like it, they (the hired workers) like it, and the cows love it."

Karen helps with the 4 a.m.

milking while Scott stays in the house to babysit their two daughters, Katelyn, 3, and Jessica, 6 months. That arrangement allows Karen to stay involved with the cows, even while the children are small. For her, it's a priority.

"Karen's a milker," Allen Nolt

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Allen Nolt milked cows on the farm for several decades before building the first new tiestall barn in 1996.

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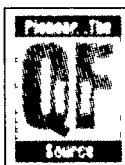
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