

Rotational Grazing Makes Financial Sense For New York Dairy

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Pastureland Dairy**

Pastureland Dairy, located in Onondaga County, is owned and operated by Peter Mapstone and his family. The transition to rotational grazing began in 1987 when Pete returned home from college. At Cornell, Pete chose to do a business analysis of the family farm as a class project. He discovered that purchased grain and concentrate accounted for approximately 50 percent of milk sales. Pete realized that a change was necessary to improve profitability.

One potential change that Pete considered was a major expansion, but projections indicated that a large expansion would not generate enough cash to meet cash commitments. Making a transition to rotational grazing appeared to offer an opportunity to generate more profits, while maximizing available resources.

Milk production did not decline when the Mapstones adopted rotational grazing. The farm presently sells 21,084 pounds per cow. Moreover, the operating cost per hundredweight of producing milk declined significantly. Pastureland Dairy incurs operating expenses of \$9.28 per hundredweight. Purchased grain and concentrate is now down to 17 percent of milk sales. Even though the herd has grown by 50 percent since 1987 to 170 cows, total purchased feed costs are only 15 percent higher.

The transition to rotational

grazing began by fully utilizing all existing pastures. Instead of pumping water uphill to paddocks, the Mapstones dug a pond to supply water via gravity. Cost control is a key factor to achieving above average profitability at Pastureland Dairy. For over five years, a pre-owned \$50 three wheeler was utilized to move cattle. Five years ago, the farm purchased a used four wheeler. The Mapstones reduced cropping costs by growing less corn; they now grow 70 acres of corn, down from 200 acres.

Making a change to grazing has produced results that transcend economic benchmark information. Pastureland Dairy has experienced improvements in overall herd health. For example, there are fewer displaced abomasums and retained placentas. A low cull rate has allowed for internal growth of 50 percent since 1987.

In 1991, Pete purchased the herd from his father, Robert. That year, Robert and Pete also agreed to a rental arrangement to allow for equipment and facilities leases. Pete is gradually acquiring equity in equipment by paying for new machinery when it is re-

placed. In 1997 he purchased a neighboring farm to allow for expanded grazing. Heifers were moved from the main farm onto the recently purchased farm that spring, after the Mapstones constructed new fences around pastures. This allowed for enlarging heifer stalls on the main farm to accommodate cows and expand the milking herd from within. Continual expansion necessitated replacing the bulk tank with a larger model.

Increased cow numbers brought about the need to improve milking efficiency. An eight-stall flat barn parlor was an economical alternative to constructing a milking parlor.

Milkers are able to achieve a through-put rate of 60 cows per hour by utilizing this setup.

A major cropping change in 1996 was replacing alfalfa hay crop silage with grass hay crop silage. This provides a smoother transition from confinement feeding in the winter to pasture-based feeding in the grazing season. In dry years, supplemental feeding of hay crop silage is necessary to provide for nutrient requirements.

One goal Pete cited was acquiring more land to allow for a constantly increasing herd. He hopes to expand cow numbers in the future to maximize

the farm's grazing capacity, which would be approximately 200 cows. Also under consideration are constructing a greenhouse facility to house calves. If this is successful, such housing may be constructed for heifers and dry cows.

There are numerous reasons why Pastureland Dairy has succeeded in utilizing rotational grazing. However, Pete gives much of the credit to his father Robert, who has provided excellent management advice, as well as labor. A benchmark that illustrates Pastureland Dairy's success as a business is a rate of return on all capital of 27.3 percent

Open House Planned At USDA-Inspected Small Livestock Processing Plant In N.Y.

OAK HILL, N.Y. — Dines Farms, in cooperation with Cornell Cooperative Extension, is inviting all interested producers to see the new USDA inspected livestock processing facility and meet the owners, father and son Jay and Matt Dines and Jon Payton.

On Saturday, May 10, the Dines will host an open house from 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. at their facility, which is located on Dingman Road off Rt. 81 in Oak Hill (in Greene County just south of the Albany County Line.)

The Dines and Payton have

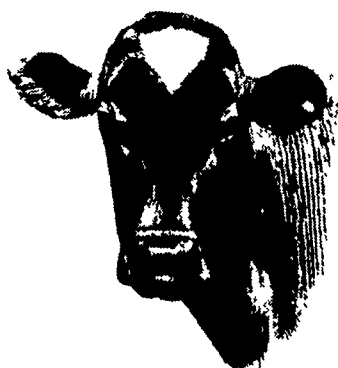
been slaughtering, processing, and marketing their own livestock at this location under New York State (NYS) inspection since 1996. They built this facility a year and a half ago because their markets were growing and they could not find reliable processing for their increasing volume of poultry and rabbits. They can provide custom slaughter and processing of poultry, rabbits, small ruminants and swine.

In the future, they may be looking to purchase animals for their ever-increasing markets. At this writing, they are in the process of getting their USDA inspection stamp. They

should be able to offer this service by the end of spring.

Livestock producers are invited to the open house to see the facility and learn what can be marketed under NYS inspection vs. USDA inspection. Lunch will feature a sampling of Dines Farms products. To register and get directions, call Billie-Jo at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County at (518) 765-3512.

For information on livestock for small farms, visit Cornell's Small Farms Website at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu. Click on "Production" then click on "Livestock."



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