

# 50 Cows, 50 Years

(Continued from Page E23)

Larry's first move as owner of the farm was to improve the labor efficiency to ease the physical demands of farming and improve the family's quality of life. He toured a few free stall barns with milking parlors in Maine and Connecticut and built the first new set up of its kind in Massachusetts for 50 cows. The free stall and parlor were important to Larry because it reduced the physical toll on a bum right knee that had been injured in a motorcycle accident. It also allowed the farm chores to be done by one person in a reasonable amount of time.

After a few years working alone on the farm, Larry decided he needed a hired man so that he could get more time off with his family. The labor efficient setup meant that Larry and the hired man alternated weekends with one of them having from Friday night through Monday morning completely off.

Larry decided to begin grazing on his farm to further reduce the labor needs. In the early 1980s, he was green-chopping forage for the cows during a particularly wet spell. After the chopper had plugged up several times in one day, he decided the cows could just as easily harvest the forage as he could. He had read a few articles about rotational grazing and turned a hay field near the barn into pasture. He had such good luck the first year, he decided to turn another field into pasture

and has been grazing ever since.

The next transition for the farm was sparked by Larry's son's experience managing the farm one summer. Larry and his wife took a two-month vacation and drove across the county the summer of 1988 and left the management of the farm to his 18-year-old son. When they returned, Larry's son informed him that he was not interested in taking over the farm because he didn't want to be tied down. Larry had heard about seasonal calving from a few magazine articles and decided to try it to see if two months off from milking would make his son more interested in taking over the farm.

For a few years, they researched it and slowly got the cows and heifers to start calving in the spring window they were aiming for. In 1990, they went seasonal and had the best year ever for the farm because they had 30 extra springing cows and heifers to sell. Since then, they have shortened their calving window from 8 to 6 weeks and have continued to have some extra cows to sell every year. Larry turned the farm over to his son in 1995.

According to Larry, seasonal calving has allowed the farm to focus their management. All of the cows are in the same stage of lactation, which means that they can be fed the appropriate feed more easily. In particular, Larry says they noticed a big im-

provement in their fresh cow health owing to a better focus on their dry cows' needs.

Seasonal calving also is beneficial in calf-raising. They raise the first 20 calves born in the spring and feed them either milk or milk replacer in mob feeders outside. They have found that calfhood illness has been almost totally eliminated because calves are only around for a few months of the year and then the facilities are empty for the rest of the year, which breaks the disease cycle.

At breeding age, the heifers are synchronized with two shots of lutealase and then bred on standing heat for three days. This results in 80 percent of the heifers being bred and a clean up bull takes care of the remainder. The lutealase treatment has not worked as well for the cows, which are bred artificially for three weeks and then bulls are turned in to catch the remaining open cows.

Since adopting grazing, Larry has been breeding for cows more suited to pasture. Larry believes that a smaller cow is better adapted to grazing and seasonal calving. After his first few years grazing, he began selecting sires that were below average in stature and above average in percentage components for his registered Holsteins.

More recently, Larry has experimented with cross-

breeding with Jerseys and has been quite happy with the results. While they do not produce as high components as he had been expecting, the Jersey crosses have been about equal milk production to the Holsteins and seem to breed back more easily. Larry is planning on following the advice of Dr. Steve Washburn, a professor at North Carolina State doing research on crossbreeding, to continue crossing Holsteins and Jerseys back and forth to maintain at least 25% of each breed in each cross. The herd currently averages 16-17,000 pounds of milk sold per cow per year on a ration of eight to 15 pounds of grain, 20 pounds of corn silage, and 20 to 30 pounds of pasture or grass silage or hay.

One of the latest influences in Larry's thinking about pasture-based dairy farming was a trip he took to Ireland in 1998. The trip was put together by the Stockman Grassfarmer. Larry was impressed by the grazing management and labor efficiency on the Irish dairies they toured. He became convinced that the intensive grazing they practice — concentrating 70-80 cows on a one-acre paddock for 12 hours — leads to better pasture utilization and regrowth.

He was also impressed by the labor efficiency on Irish dairies. Larry described a 120-cow dairy run by a husband and wife where the wife


set up the parlor, milked the cows and cleaned up in just an hour. That dairy had a swing 12 parlor and most of the dairies had fairly large parlors, by our standards, that allowed them to milk the cows in a short amount of time.

Upon returning from the trip, Larry has intensified the pasture management on the farm. Now cows are turned into a paddock at six inches tall and paddocks are grazed on eight to 12 days of rest. This has resulted in a change in the pasture species from mainly orchardgrass to mainly Kentucky bluegrass and white clover. Larry believes the intense grazing has led to less forage wasted by the cows and alleviated weed problems.

A third of the grazing acreage had been seeded in 1997 to perennial ryegrass and Larry is quite happy with the results. There has been no winter-kill and the ryegrass seems to do well under the intense management Larry is practicing.

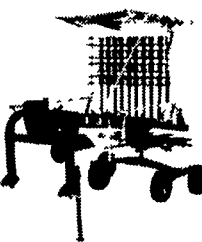
Larry's thoughtful approach to farming has allowed the farm to remain at 50 cows and achieve the quality of life that he and his family desire. Along the way, he has been an early adopter of several cutting edge practices that have worked well for him in part because they met his criteria for both profitability and lifestyle.

Here's something *Lancaster Farming* subscribers have been waiting for: the 2003 *Lancaster Farming Fair Guide* booklet, scheduled to premier May 24. Thousands of our readers count on *Lancaster Farming* to provide them with the latest fair news during the summer and fall season. You can look toward the fairs with this extensive directory, covering an eight-state region. Planned is a list of fairs and fair association news. Will photos of your family turn up in the book from fairs around the region? Check it out!

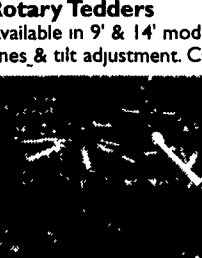


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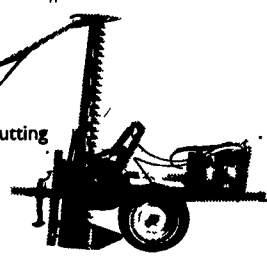
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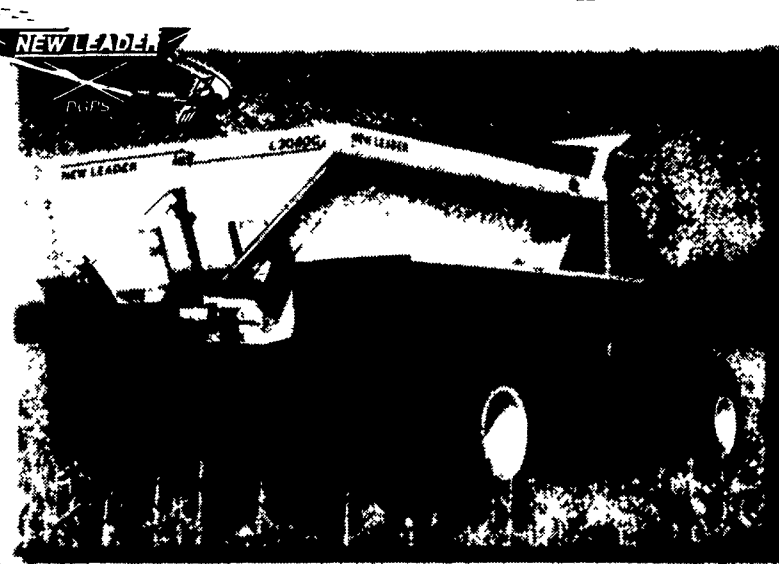
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