

# Switch to Ayrshires, Grazing Profitable For Hoppaugh Family

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SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP (Bradford Co.) - Ray and Joann Hoppaugh farm with their son Danny. They couldn't be more certain of the future of Pennsylvania's dairy industry, especially on their 236-acre dairy in the rolling hills of Bradford County.

Since they began farming in 1964, the Hoppaugh family had to roll with the changing times. They relocated to Bradford County from New Jersey after the farm they were renting there was no longer available. Since then, they have been willing to make adjustments as needed in order to remain profitable in the dairy business.

"We knew we couldn't stay in New Jersey forever, so we were actively looking for farms in this area for eight years. We always liked this area. In 1972, we bought this farm," said Ray.

The Hoppaugh family has been well-known breeders of registered Holsteins, proud of their high milk production av-



The Hoppaugh herd consists of Ayrshires with a few Holsteins sprinkled in.

erages, high breed age average (BAA), and Progressive Breeder awards. For many years, they ran a conventional farm, growing corn and hay and feeding the cows in the barn.

Eleven years ago, their philosophy of farming took a turn, they say, for the better — although they admit they have learned a lot along the way.

"As time evolved, we had all registered Holsteins, had a good herd average well into the 20,000 pounds and had a high BAA and all that kind of stuff, but we figured there had to be a better way. There just wasn't a lot of return on the money and it was very labor intensive. We just decided we needed to do something better and more efficient," said Ray.

Grazing turned out to be the answer that the Hoppaugh family were searching for.

The family was not a stranger to the concept of rotational grazing. As a college student at Cobleskill, N.Y., Danny had seen the benefits of grazing first-hand. And as part of his training as a consultant with Pennfield Feeds, Ray had attended many meetings where grazing was the topic.



The view from the top of one of the farm's hayfields almost gives an aerial picture. The Hoppaugh family owns 236 acres in Northern Bradford County and rents another 150 acres of ground.

"I remember sitting at meetings and people would bring up this grazing thing and I thought, 'how stupid could people be?' Here I had a herd average of 24-plus thousand pounds of milk. Why would I want to decrease it?" said Ray. "And two years later I was doing (grazing) and liking it."

Once the decision to graze was made, the Hoppaugh family jumped in with both feet.

"With grazing, you have to be committed. You can't do

it half," Ray said.

"The old impression was that grazing was for poor people. The old-timers used to have a night pasture and a day pasture and they would put the cows out on the side hills where you couldn't plow. We started using cropland for grazing and people thought we were nuts. They would ask what we were going to feed in the winter." Winter feed proved not to be an issue, even with last year's drought.

"We've got so much feed left over that it's unreal," said Ray.

Part of their switch to grazing included relying on custom workers to harvest corn silage and haylage.

"We fenced about 95 acres of cropland," said Ray. "We have about 236 acres here and we rent another 150 acres. We do about 30 acres of corn silage for rotation reasons and because I don't have a manure storage and I need a place to put manure. Some day, that will probably go away because we forward contract for corn silage."

Custom workers are hired to harvest the haylage. The Hoppaugh family mows and rakes the grass and provides a tractor and the blower, and the custom operators do the rest.

"We try to specialize mostly in haying equipment. We do round bales and baleage and do that while we're waiting for the chopper to come. Then, we clean off as many acres as we can," said

(Turn to Page A38)

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Joann Hoppaugh, right, is in charge of calf management. Here she is joined by Ray and Danny Hoppaugh for the morning feeding.