

Organic Dairyman Profits From Doing What He Believes

(Continued from Page 12)

The Stoltzfooses milk about 135 cows on a semi-seasonal basis. A lot of the cows are Holstein/Jersey crossbreeds. Most of them calve in the spring, but the herd is never dry all at once, as in a fully seasonal operation.

Numbers such as rolling herd average and individual cow production are not the most important consideration to Stoltzfoos. He focuses instead on the profit he reaps from each acre of grassland. On Spring Wood Farm, Stoltzfoos said that figure is higher than it ever was before he switched to grazing.

Stoltzfoos's learning curve has offered multiple challenges and benefits.

"I've seen years that have been more profitable than I ever expected," he said of the past decade. "I've also seen difficult years." While the organic milk price has been fairly constant, the weather was less so.

Both droughty seasons and unusually wet ones like this year have created challenges for the grazer, but he remains committed to grass-based farming.

The entire farm is planted in a mix of grasses and clovers, with a bit of alfalfa in some of the fields. Orchardgrass is the "staple" forage, followed by white and red clovers, ryegrass, fescues, and other varieties of grass. Hay on the farm is custom-harvested in large square bales, wrapped round bales, or as haylage, depending on the weather.

To help meet energy demands, the cows are supplemented year-round with a total mixed ration of three parts hay, six parts corn, and four parts of



Crossbreeding is evident in the Stoltzfoos herd. The cows pass through the fly blocker on the way to being milked.



Composting plays a major part in soil fertility on Spring Wood Farm. Here Clifford Stoltzfoos aerates the row.



Josh Stoltzfoos feeds new chicks. Pastured poultry is one way the Stoltzfoos farm has diversified.

spelt. In wintertime, hay is the main feed source.

According to Stoltzfoos, he switched to grazing for two big reasons: to reduce cow health problems and produce high quality milk.

"It's better for the cow and better for the milk supply," he said. Metabolic disorders, especially ketosis and milk fever, have all but disappeared since he put the cows out on grass and cut back on grain feeding, he said.

The increasingly known benefits of grassfed animal products for human health have helped create a market for Stoltzfoos's milk. They've also helped Lucy and him know that their own children are getting good food.

"We have children and we want them to be healthy," he said. "We have a product that people can truly benefit from."

He and other graziers aren't the only people who have that viewpoint, according to Stoltzfoos.

(Turn to Page 28)