

Organic Dairyman Profits

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Caleb Stoltzfoos, 9, pointed out one of the drawbacks of the fly catcher.

"If it would get the flies from under the cow it would be better," he said. "That's where they are."

One of Caleb's chores, along with his brother Joshua, 11, and his dad, is to milk the cows in the New Zealand 22-unit swing-style parlor.

According to Roman, it takes the three of them 45 minutes to an hour to milk the herd of 135 cows. Milking is done twice a day and is a "pleasant" experience, he said.

Labor efficiency was one of the things that impressed Stoltzfoos from a 1997 trip he took to New Zealand dairy farms. There, he noticed that "nobody spent more than an hour milking," even in large operations.

The Stoltzfooses began milking in their new parlor early in 2000. Prior to that, the herd was milked in a stall-barn.

Another lesson Stoltzfoos learned from New Zealand is to focus on production per acre rather than per cow, and to keep costs low.

"Granted, this is not New Zealand," Stoltzfoos said. "But there's much that's applicable. It's not about herd average. It's all about profit."

The Lancaster Organic Farmer's Cooperative has 18 farmer members that provide milk for the Natural By Nature brand available in some stores in the area. The co-op also makes cheese, some of which is sold at Miller's Health Food Store in Leola.

The organic milk price has been steady at about \$20 or more per hundredweight.

One challenge to marketing organic milk is the seasonal limitation. Since grass is a requirement for certified organic milk, there tends to be a much larger milk supply in the spring and summer and a deficit in the winter.

Stoltzfoos is bothered by a trend toward pasteurization at higher temperatures in order to provide ESL (extended shelf life) milk for consumers. Because organic milk is a relatively low-volume product in stores, some organic processors have been offering the ESL products to increase the shelf life of milk up to six months. Although Natural By Nature doesn't sell ESL milk, Stoltzfoos worries the market may increasingly demand it.

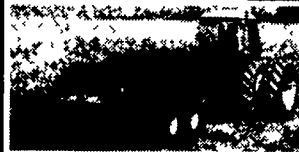
For health's sake, he believes raw milk from grassfed cows is the best. He sells some off the farm to neighbors and other individuals, but mourns the time when buying products directly from the farmer was normal.

"The biggest harm that happened to American

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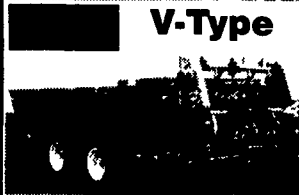
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