



Penn State Cooperative Extension Capitol Region Dairy Team

RENTING HEIFER FACILITIES
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Renting livestock facilities is necessary for young families getting started in the business. They have debt to pay on their cattle and equipment, and adding more debt to own buildings would make the banker very nervous. So they look for shelter that can be rented to house their animals.

It would be nice to say that the space to house a heifer is worth so many dollars per year. The problem is that the dairy farmer would like to find a modern facility and all he can find is an old bank barn. Both will house cattle, but how can we evaluate the facility to come up with a comparable cost of use?

It is not just a matter of space. Even ignoring ventilation and animal comfort issues (which we should never do!), the cost of housing includes bedding and labor and manure handling costs — which all vary greatly between housing systems.

Some years ago I prepared a study looking at the cost of rearing heifers. Three levels of housing investment were considered:

- High investment, a slatted floor and freestall.
- Medium investment, a “Virginia counterslope.”
- Zero investment, a bank barn or chicken coop.

Let’s look at the annual costs per bred heifer housed as used in that study. (See chart.)

Examining these numbers more closely we might suggest that the maximum a renter should pay to rent a Medium facility would be \$170 per heifer per year. She could “own” her own structure for that annual cost. Because of location and convenience considerations, the renter might want to get the use of this facility for \$100 or less a head. Regardless of rent paid, bedding and labor will add another \$50 to annual costs.

Now this Low investment bank barn is another matter. The owner should be thrilled to get \$20 a heifer per year for it because then all his costs are covered. In reality it might not be



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worth even that. Theoretically, if (and it is a *BIG if*) the bank barn raises heifers as well as the medium facility, the renter should pay a maximum of \$50 less that he can rent a medium facility for. This is because bedding and labor will cost \$50 more for the bank barn than for the medium facility. That means that if the renter could rent a counterslope facility for \$100 then an *equal quality* bank barn would be worth \$50. Unfortunately most of us can not point to a single old bank barn which raises heifers as healthily as a counterslope.

These figures are used to illustrate a process that needs to be followed in coming up with comparable rental rates. Use your own numbers to evaluate each unique situation which you encounter. Make sure that you factor in the cost of correcting any ventilation and other inadequacies.

In this century when nobody leases a Ford Model T buckboard to provide for his transport needs, we have to ask why people are still willing to spend good money for the equivalent technology in animal housing. Perhaps the answer is that bank barns are the only alternative available. But we need to be creative and make sure that, whatever housing system we consider, it provides adequate ventilation, some protection from severe weather, convenient access to feed and water, and a reasonable manure disposal system.

	High	Medium	Low
Investment/heifer	\$1,200	\$875	\$0
Loan, repairs, tax	\$205	\$170	\$20
Bedding	\$10	\$13	\$20
Labor	\$18	\$37	\$80
Annual cost	\$233	\$220	\$120

LanChester Pork Council Talks SWAP

CHARLENE M. SHUPP ESPENSHADE
Lancaster Farming Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — An estimated 50 swine producers gathered at Yoder’s Restaurant Tuesday to discuss current production issues and elect their board of directors.

Issues included animal health, animal welfare programs, and the pork quality assurance program.

A highlight of the discussion was the new Swine Welfare Assurance Program (SWAP) by Erik Risa of the National Pork Council. The SWAP program was launched in August 2003.

This program is a voluntary producer program that offers an objective, scientifically based welfare assessment of pigs.

“SWAP is an objective assessment of welfare,” said Risa, “(and) is independent of housing or size.”

SWAP was developed to assist producers in measuring animal welfare on the farm. Risa stresses that when an operation enters into the program, SWAP “does not certify a person, it certifies the site.”

The SWAP program is hopeful to provide an answer to the recent concerns of the retail food industry for a guarantee that suppliers are using animal welfare practices. The nine principles to be evaluated focus on the area of records, animal observations, and facilities.

The SWAP program consists of having a certified SWAP educator visit the farm to review the operation. After the initial evaluation, a farm is provided benchmarks on how the operation is doing. Benchmarking provides the producer a way to handle the farm’s welfare assessments.

However, Risa stresses that SWAP was not developed in reaction to the retail industry. The program was started in 2000 as a proactive action by pork producers.

To summarize the hopes of the program, Risa said, “In the end,



Newly elected board members to the LanChester Pork Council were, from left, Nelson Beam, Elverson; Scott Bailey, Ephrata; and Kurt Good, Denver. They are congratulated by board member Peter Day, far right, Ephrata. Photos by Charlene Shupp Espenshade



Speakers for the meeting were from left, Dale Spiess, Nichole Boettger, Erik Risa, and Bob Mikesell.

its the right thing to do. It demonstrates our commitment to welfare.”

Nichole Boettger of National Pork Council also addressed what is happening at the national office. In regards to how they are handling the “constitutionality” question of promotion checkoff programs, it is “business as usual” until a ruling is made.

Also, Boettger noted the start of an eight-course distance learning program. The course examines different production issues, providing the “science behind the

tactics instead of the how-to,” she said. The courses are available on an interactive CD and allow producers to utilize them when it fits their schedule.

Dale Spiess of Boehringer Ingelheim and Charlie Francisco of Intervet spoke about animal health products and practices that could be utilized on the farm to improve productivity.

At the annual meeting, three directors were re-elected to another term. They were Scott Bailey, Ephrata; Nelson Beam, Elverson; and Kurt Good, Denver.

2004 PENNSYLVANIA HOLSTEIN ASSOCIATION CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 10	11 30A M DAUPHIN COUNTY ANNUAL MEETING GEO'S FAMILY RESTAURANT, HARRISBURG, PA
JANUARY 17	9 00A M PA PDCA JUDGING CONFERENCE FARM SHOW COMPLEX, HARRISBURG, PA
JANUARY 24	7 00P M BEAVER/LAWRENCE ANNUAL MEETING
JANUARY 24	7 30P M CLARION/VENANGO ANNUAL MEETING WOLF'S DEN RESTAURANT, KNOX, PA
FEBRUARY 6-8	2004 PA JUNIOR HOLSTEIN CONVENTION FOUR POINTS SHERATON, GREENSBURG, PA
FEBRUARY 6	6 30P M BUCKS COUNTY ANNUAL MEETING ST MATTHEWS LUTHERN CHURCH, DOYLESTOWN, PA
FEBRUARY 13	7 30P M WARREN COUNTY ANNUAL MEETING 4-H BUILDING, FAIRGROUNDS, PITTSFIELD, PA
FEBRUARY 19-21	2004 PA HOLSTEIN CONVENTION FOUR POINTS SHERATON, GREENSBURG, PA
FEBRUARY 20	10 00A M 91 ST ANNUAL MEETING, PA HOLSTEIN ASSOC FOUR POINTS SHERATON, GREENSBURG, PA
FEBRUARY 21	10 00A M PA HOLSTEIN CONVENTION SALE FOUR POINTS SHERATON, GREENSBURG, PA
MARCH 3	12 30P M HOLSTEIN USA REGION 2 MEMBERSHIP MEETING HOLIDAY INN, NEW CUMBERLAND, PA
MARCH 26	9 30A M PA HOLSTEIN SPRING SHOW FARM SHOW COMPLEX, HARRISBURG, PA
APRIL 3	11 00A M DELAWARE VALLEY COLLEGE GREEN & GOLD SALE DELAWARE VALLEY COLLEGE, DOYLESTOWN, PA
APRIL 16	7 00P M WESTERN PA SPRING SPECTACULAR SALE 4-H PARK, MERCER, PA
APRIL 23	7 00P M SOUTHWEST PA SPRING SENSATION SALE FAYETTE COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS, UNIONTOWN, PA
APRIL 29	11 00A M PA HOLSTEIN HEIFER SALE PA HOLSTEIN FARM MIDDLETOWN, PA