

MANAGING RISK

If You Can't See Them, They Can't See You

By JJ Schell

October is a busy time for farmers. The work of bringing in the fall crops to store for winter is well underway. The buzz of forage harvesters and combines can be heard across the region as picturesque cornfields fall victim to the voracious appetite of the cutter head.

Corn silage is the backbone of many dairy and beef rations, and numerous acres are harvested every fall. Safety is a concern during all phases of corn silage harvest, but safety on the highway stands out as a major concern. Many farmers have to travel long distances to harvest crops from widely separated fields.

Unfortunately, you can't control what other drivers do. But you can take steps to make yourself more visible and reduce the likelihood of an accident. Most producers make

sure the equipment they operate is safe and road-ready, but sometimes, when time becomes a factor in harvesting the crop, safety is compromised.

It is important to make sure all lights, mirrors, brakes, and steering are adjusted properly and working correctly. A tractor



Corn Silage is an important forage crop for dairy and beef rations, and with the proper precautions, can be safely harvested and stored.

used during the day that has no amber hazard lights or headlights will become an accident waiting to happen if the harvest pushes into the nighttime hours. Improperly adjusted or missing mirrors on tractors, with cabs, will create challenges when turning in and out of fields.

Before going to the field, make sure all safety devices are in operating condition. Find and fix any safety-related problems you may have noticed but did not take time to repair, such as a missing or broken shield, burned-out light bulb, or troublesome switch.

Make sure you have a Slow Moving Vehicle sign prominently displayed and properly fastened to the rear of equipment such as a gravity box or self-unloading wagon. Faded or dirty reflective strips and Slow Moving Vehicle symbols should be cleaned or replaced.

Pull-type forage harvesters, if not properly lighted, become a big safety risk at night due to their slow speed and width. Use reflective tape to outline the dimensions of

the equipment so motorists can make out the size at night.

Another good practice is to use a flag person to help you get in and out of fields on a busy highway, or near blind spots on hills and curves. The flag person can also signal to motorists that there is a need to slow down.

It's this simple: If you make your field equipment more visible you are less likely to have a serious accident. Farming is dangerous. Take the time to maintain and operate machinery safely so you and your family can have a successful fall harvest season without personal injury or property damage.

For more information, the New York Center for Agriculture Medicine and Health is a great resource for information on how you can make your farm equipment more visible to motorists. You can contact NYCAMH toll-free at 800-743-7527.

JJ Schell is Agriculture Program Leader with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie County.

GRAZING

Bucking the Trends: Seasonal Dairy Start-up Adds Valuable Diversity to Dairy Industry

By Fay Benson

This spring residents of New York's Cortland County driving by the well known Space farm noticed some cows of a different color out in the pastures. The farm is easily recognized by the large "SPACE" shingled into the 140 foot long roof of the main barn.

The cows look different because they're crossbreds. But that's not the only difference on this farm; Bob and Nancy Space have rented the farm to Jim and Anne Philips who farm it as a seasonal dairy. The Philips only produce milk 9 to 10 months of the year. For the remaining 2-3 months of the year, people and cows take a break.

Seasonal dairying takes advantage of the low cost associated with grazing dairy cows, by making milk when there is grass growing. It is one of the techniques small dairies are using to remain profitable in the dairy industry. In Cortland County, as with the rest of the state, there has been an exodus of small dairies, those milking under a hundred or so cows. The trend has been towards larger farms where efficiency of scale can be captured.

For those farmers that want to manage smaller dairies, seasonal milking is just one of the solutions to remain profitable. Other solutions include managed grazing, farmstead cheese production, or transition to the organic dairy market.

EXTENSION -- A RESOURCE FOR NEW FARMERS

Jim and Anne contacted the Cortland County Extension office in 2004 looking for a farm in Central NY. They had a herd of cows in Ohio and were looking for a farm located near Cornell where Anne had agreed to work. Cornell Cooperative Extension has historically been a source of networking for those looking to buy or rent a farm and those that have a farm to rent or sell.

Besides helping the Philips locate farms to look at in the area, the South Central NY Dairy Team, which is centered in Cortland's Extension office, assisted them with developing a business plan. The team's Farm Business Specialist, Jacob Schuelke, helped work through the different types of arrangements that the Philips' were considering.

The Spaces, having retired from dairying a few years ago, were committed to keeping their land in farming even though the land around them is highly sought after for housing lots. The desires of the two families made for an easy match. I was asked to facilitate the discussion that resulted in the rental agreement between the two families.

SEASONAL DAIRYING

The Philips farm isn't the only seasonal dairy in the area. Just a mile up the road Mike Carroll and his father Earl have been seasonal dairy farmers for a number of years. They find the change in seasons enjoyable. Milking cows twice a day for 365 days a year can be wearing to some farmers and their families. The two to three month break during the winter provides a nice change of pace.

Both the Carrolls and the Philips are regular participants in educational meetings during the winter and long family vacations are possible too. In March and April when the baby calves are being born there are plenty of long nights and teaching a year's worth of calves to eat from the feeders in one month takes a lot of patience. But as Mike Carroll says, "Once it's over I don't have to do it again till next year."

Cows give the most milk shortly after they've had their calves. This means spring calving fits well with Central NY's climate, since the spring is when the most nutritious grass grows. This is the synergy that makes seasonal dairying profitable. When the animals need the highest nutrition, nature provides it in grass, which is a crop



Jim and Anne Philips moved from Ohio to New York to start a small, seasonal dairy farm with their three children.

Photo by Fay Benson

that is relatively inexpensive to grow and needs no herbicides.

Since the cow is harvesting the grass herself and is spreading her manure back on the land, fuel costs are also low. When the cows are "dry" (8-10 weeks before they calve again) they don't require as high a level of nutrition. So the stored grass harvested in the summer goes a long way in keeping them in the winter.

DIVERSITY LEADS TO STRENGTH

Seasonal dairying isn't for everyone; it requires a different type of management, one that focuses more on cost control rather than on production. That is the benefit of having a diverse dairy industry in the Northeast; where a variety of farming styles exist to suit the diverse types of farmers looking to farm. This diversity encourages an influx of new dairy farmers, which is important to those who are already farming in a region.

Without new farmers taking the place of those that have transitioned out of the business, there wouldn't be the critical mass of farms which need the products and services that agri-business provides. Many regions of the state are experiencing longer drives for machinery parts, less choices for Veterinary services, and more difficulty in finding other support services.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Philips are in the process of transitioning to certified organic dairy production as well. Their plan is to eventually have Anne stay at home and work on the farm with their three young children. In order to be successful they realize they will need to buck a few trends along the way.

Fay Benson is the Small Farm Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cortland County. This article is reprinted with permission from the Cortland Standard, June 1st 2006

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