

YEAR-ROUND DRYLOT DAIRYING

Becoming More Popular

Farmers say they can carry more cows on the same acreage. With higher production per cow, they can increase business size; get more efficient use of land and labor.

If you plan to stay in the dairy business, it may be wise to consider the possibility of a total drylot operation the year-round. Dairy specialists say it may not be too many years before grazing dairy cows on pasture will be as out-dated and old fashioned as the one horse plow and open pollinated corn.

Main reason more dairymen are considering a year-round drylot program is the need for increasing farm business size and production per man. Today it takes a larger herd to make efficient use of all equipment needed for milk production. This means more feed—which must either come through higher forage production on the land you have now, or increased acreage. With the present high price on good land, it's usually more practical to boost feed output per acre and get more efficient use of the land you're now farming.

Basically, there are two types of systems you can use in a drylot dairy operation—stored feed the year-round, or green chopping forage daily for the herd. Both systems will give you more forage production per acre than when either a strip or rotational grazing program is used.

In five years of comparative feeding trials at Wisconsin's Marshfield Experiment Station, milk production per acre has been 19% greater from green chopping than from strip grazing. The use of all stored feed (hay and silage) produced 30% more milk per acre than from strip grazing.

This improvement has come from higher carrying capacity per acre. With the use of all stored feed it took about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre to produce enough feed for a cow. This compared with 0.7 acre with green chopping and 0.85 acre with strip grazing. Forage production potential was the same on all land, but the strip-grazed cows trampled and wasted more grass than when mechanical harvesting was used.

Ohio economists say you must increase milk output per acre by about 400 pounds in order to afford to switch from conventional grazing to green chopping. In the Wisconsin trials, milk output was increased twice this much. When using all stored feed output was more than three times greater.

These trials are being substantiated by dairymen around the country. Cleo Nitzsche, a purebred Brown Swiss breeder in Randolph County, Illinois, says, "I now get about twice as much forage production per acre by green chopping as when I was letting the cows graze on pasture. Besides, it's not as hard on my fields."

Nitzsche presently has a herd average of about 500 pounds fat and is attempting to increase this to 600 pounds. "I think a drylot program will make it easier for me to reach this level. Besides, I can carry more cows than when I was grazing during summer." He is now harvesting forage as green chop but says weather is his big problem. As soon as possible he would like to begin feeding stored feed the year-round—it will eliminate the daily chopping chore and give him more uniform quality forage throughout the year.

At first you might think labor would be a problem on a total drylot operation. Granted you must spend more time cleaning lots and hauling manure, but the higher production possibilities far outweigh this. Much of the feed and other materials can be handled mechanically. By using timeclocks and automatic switches, labor needs can be kept to a minimum.

Jack Ellis of near Durand, Michigan, says mechanization has been a big help to him. He farms 195 acres and takes care of 80 head of cattle—35 milking cows, 15 feeders and 30 dairy heifers—all by himself. Most of his feed is stored in silos and feeding operation is mechanized.

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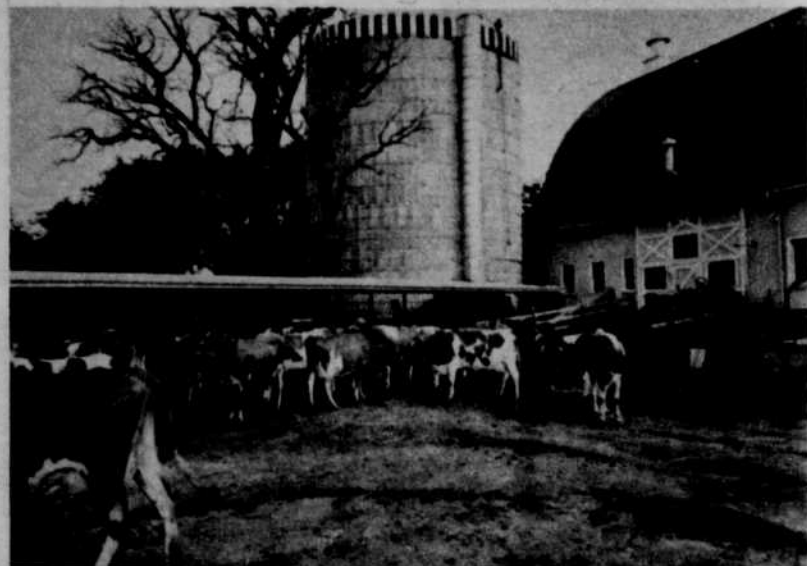
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Dairymen find they can get more milk production per acre of grass by hauling it to the cows and feeding in drylot the year-round. Under most grazing operations dairymen find their cows use only about half the forage produced, but by harvesting mechanically they can utilize nearly all of the forage. This advantage alone is often worth more than the cost of added equipment and facilities needed.



Plenty of concrete is needed for a drylot dairy feeding operation in this part of the country. It helps you save more manure and you have less trouble with wet, muddy lots. This Wisconsin farmer is using silage, distributed automatically to the cows under the covered feed bunk. Concrete is scraped clean regularly to help control flies and keep cows clean.