



NNY Dairies Share Success Strategies

A project of the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program

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B&R Dairy, Clinton County: Custom Heifer Operation Serves Farm Land Base Well

The Transition

Brothers-in-law Steve Bechard and Bob Roy transitioned from milking 150 cows to custom raising heifers so their farming operation would support two families and provide for retirement for the family's senior generation.

In 1980, Steve and Bob took over Steve's parents' dairy operation in West Chazy, Clinton County. Over the next seven years, they increased the herd to about 150 cows, but still weren't making enough income - mostly due to low milk price and tired equipment - to support two families. So, in 1987, they decided to participate in the dairy buy-out program and sold their herd.

Initially, they switched the operation over to a cropping enterprise, but cash flow was still tight. Compounding this was the fact that it was hard to sell all the feed that they were producing. Gradually, they started raising heifers as a means to get rid of their extra feed.

In 1993, Steve and Bob decided to transition to custom raising heifers full-time. They converted the old freestall barn into a drive-through barn with bedded pack stalls and freestalls. Starting with just 125 heifers from three farms, they eventually hit capacity at 300 heifers and had to add another 214-stall barn in 1995. By gradually expanding over time, Steve and Bob were able to keep their customers happy and maintain cash flow.

Today, B&R Dairy still operates on the land base they had as a 100-cow dairy, raising 1,800 animals for farms in Northern New York and Vermont. All animals are fed a total mixed ration balanced for maximum growth and performance during critical development stages. Steve and Bob crop about 850 acres

Mechanics, Management & Resources

Steve and Bob formed a C Corporation, bought the cattle and equipment, and leased the farm from Steve's father. Partners Steve and Bob share livestock responsibilities. Bob's emphasis is on cropping; Steve handles record keeping and payroll on Quickbooks. Cindy, Bob's

wife, works for a private feed company and does the ration balancing and offers nutritional advice.

According to Steve, cost control has been their biggest advantage. From the start, they have strived to keep capital expenses low, making improvements to their existing structures, rather than buying land. In addition, B&R Dairy does not own the animals they raise. The heifers they are raised on contract for other farmers. In this manner, they do not have to tie up their cash in animals.

The Future

Steve and Bob feel that their heifer raising business is here to stay. They would like to grow to 2,500 animals by improving facilities and adding mechanized feeding and manure handling. Things can always be improved, Steve says, and he and Bob constantly strive to keep their customers happy and to maintain a good working environment for themselves and their three full-time employees.

Transition Tips

In addition to controlling costs and capital expenditures, Steve and Bob feel that the keys to their success have include:

- good crop land
- being in the heart of a good dairy area
- good management, and
- the ability of the partners to accept different roles in the business.

Although the transition appeared to go well on the outside, Steve and Bob feel that it was a difficult process and that it could been smoother if they had prepared more. If they were to do it all again, they would:

- improve communications with both their customers and their bankers during the transition and expansion years, and
- seek help with facilitating family discussions.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program provided funding for a project that profiles NNY dairies and their success strategies, found online at www.nnyagdev.org. The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is a farmer-driven research and education program specific to New York state's six northernmost counties: Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton and Essex. Thirty-three farmers serve on the Program board led by Co-Chairs Jon Greenwood of Canton (315-386-3231) and Joe Giroux of Plattsburgh (518) 563-7523. For more information, contact Jon, Joe or R. David Smith at 607-255-7286 or visit www.nnyagdev.org

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