

SABBATH DAIRY MANAGEMENT

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Many dairymen upon learning of God's weekly and annual Sabbaths are faced with the dilemma of how to continue with their dairy programme and keep God's commands regarding His Sabbaths.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:" (Ex. 20:8-10). God set apart the Sabbaths to teach us His laws and purposes that we may receive His abundant blessings.

The practices of modern agriculture have come into vogue without regard for God's laws. Because of this, God's ways seem strange and burdensome to today's world. But remember, the Israelites coming out of Egypt faced similar problems (Ex. 16:4, 25-28).

Now the question is -- what can we do to avoid milking and other farm work on God's Sabbaths?

A diversified farm programme should actually be planned AROUND God's Sabbaths. Agriculture should present the most wholesome and balanced way of life possible for mankind, instead of the highly specialized, competitive systems now being practiced. We each need to plan and work toward a well-balanced, diversified farm for the whole family.

Here in Bricket Wood we are trying out a system which we believe is new to the dairy industry. We know it will work, and think it may be the ultimate answer, even for millennial conditions.

Our cows are milked only ONCE a day, and they suckle their own calves throughout the entire lactation. The calves graze in the pastures with their mothers all day, then they are shut in the special calf-pen overnight and the cows are milked each morning.

At first, this will sound to be a most unlikely way of operating a full scale dairy operation and there are always built-in prejudices which we all acquire through growing up with certain practices. These must be overcome before our ideas can be changed. One of the first questions we can then ask ourselves is this: As God meant man to use the milk of animals (Gen. 18:8) would it then be His intention that we should place the growth-rate and general health of the next animal generation in jeopardy? EVERY farmer knows this is exactly what dairymen have

done for years, and a large part of the veterinary bills of the Dairy Industry are sad proof of this widespread mistake!

We introduced this "new system" in 1967 and it is working out very well. We knew it would work before we started because it is, after all, nothing more than an adaptation of the way the "milkers" have been handled on sheep and cattle stations for generations.

Admittedly the station milking cows usually get the best feed available, but it is worth noting that these cows always produce the healthiest-looking calves!

Cows under this form of management each raise a calf that is as saleable as those produced by the best beef cows. At the same time they also supply a satisfactory level of milk and cream for home use. Therefore it is felt that these dairy-type cows are more than paying for the extra feed received.

Our thinking here in Bricket Wood was that the College has a need for both meat and milk, so why not apply this "old Bushman's" system to a full-scale dairy herd, and produce both at the same time. We did, and it works!

If the calves are not shut away from the cows on Friday evening, they will do the milking for us on the Sabbath. (The calves could be shut in their yard on Sabbath morning if it was felt necessary to milk the cows immediately after the Sabbath. A number of other variations will readily come to mind after a little thought.)

Every farmer needs to be away from his job for a few days during the year and this system (operated in the right way) will enable him to leave his dairy cows and calves grazing in the pastures, just as if they were a BEEF herd!

Could anything be simpler than this, and at the same time get away from the modern trend toward specialized agriculture, as well as practise a more natural type of stock management?

Every individual who will seriously think of putting such a system into practice is sure to come against problems and difficulties. Farmers need to realize that "difficulties" over Sabbath-keeping are not limited to those who work in the towns and cities!

"Difficulties" over Sabbath-keeping stem mostly from ideas formulated in our own minds during years of ignorance. In 6,000 years it has never been natural for man to keep the Sabbath (Rom. 8:7).

If God's Holy Spirit is not working powerfully in us as farmers, we will not "bend over backwards" to avoid even inadvertently putting our

foot on God's time. Every one of us must constantly be in an attitude of mind where we would literally fear and quake at the thought and consequences of our wrong actions (Ex. 31:14-15; 35:2).

It would do us all good to read Num. 15:32-36, every time we find our mind coming up with human reasoning over points of Sabbath-keeping in Agriculture (See also Isa. 56:2, 58:13-14 and Ezek. 20:12-13).

An operational problem we have come up against is a low butterfat level in the milk from some cows. This is because the calves are getting more of the cream than the humans. One way this can be overcome is by putting the calf back onto the cow before turning her out of the milking shed. The hungry calf will cause her to "let down" that last pint or two of rich, creamy milk that she has been holding back until last. As soon as the dairyman sees she has "let it down", the calf can be removed and most of this final milk taken, either by machine or by hand.

Another method would be to wean some of the older calves and at most times of the year rely on these cows to lift the overall butterfat of the herd. Those particular cows would then have to be milked perhaps once on the Sabbath.

We find the most important thing is to persevere and this system WILL work. It obviously takes many more cows to produce the milk figures of the past and admittedly cow numbers cannot be increased on most farms.

But slashed milk production is offset by good returns from high quality young beef. These young animals command top prices in the meat markets of the world and the farmer also receives added financial protection through diversification.

A longer-term but equally valuable benefit that will keep on increasing over many years is IMPROVED ANIMAL HEALTH. Farmers hardly need reminding that this is a triple-headed blessing! Improved animal health means first -- higher production, then longer productive life and finally a saving on veterinary bills, wasted man hours and premature animal deaths.

One example is worth quoting: a recent television documentary showing the financial plight of modern agriculture cited an interesting case. A hardworking young family on a small dairy farm netted only £102 after a year of tough slogging and enormous hours. Only one significant point slipped by without a worthwhile comment -- the veterinary bills for this farm amounted to £12 per week! An extreme example perhaps, but the viewer was given no indication that there was anything unusual about such a huge outlay. By implication, £12 per week for veterinary services

was accepted as an unavoidable and legitimate expense on a balance sheet that left this farmer with only £2 per week

Yes, obeying God's laws really does pay dividends.