Farm Review and Forecast

A LOOK AT AGRICULTURAL ISSUES AND FORECASTS

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Safety First On The Farm

Greenhouse barn distinctly unique

by Sandra Lee Johnston
Chieftain Staff Reporter

Driving down the fourth concession in Matilda Township a stranger might well wonder if they have left the earth.

Glistening in the sun as it rises above the tree line, the "Greenhouse Barn" is a sight to behold.

Standing like an alien spaceship, one's imagination could run wild as it comes into view. Amid the green of the trees and the clear, blue of the sky, the white clouds drift lazily past what appears to be a huge, silver space craft.

In reality, it is the newest addition to Peter Biemond and Family's farming operation. A new barn...not a spaceship, not a creation of alien proportions, just a necessary piece of equipment for the Biemonds to move into the future.

Peter and his wife are on holiday and since The Chieftain needed a story this week for the Farm Tab, we spoke to one of his sons, Bart, who seemed to be in charge while Dad was away. According to Bart, the idea of a greenhouse barn was not an original, but was something the family followed up after the OMAF office suggested it was a design he might be interested in.

After careful consideration; "My dad always thinks things through thoroughly before he moves on anything," says Bart; and a trip to Lindsay to check out a similar structure and speak to the owner/operator of the business utilizing it, clarified some questions, cleared away the doubts and gave Peter something concrete to think about. As he visualized what such a structure could mean to the farm, he became convinced it was the way they should go...it was decided to try something that seems a chance to some, a novel idea to others. There are many greenhouses in this area and they all seem to have withstood the weather, to work effectively and efficiently...why not a barn which uses the same principles?

When looking down the 192 foot long structure which the Biemonds built themselves a feeling of spaciousness overwhelms you.

Three lengths of galvanized, heavy gauge steel stands tall. Two of the modules are the same length, the third being shorter. Haylage is already stored for the winter which looms ahead. Stacked in the northerly module, it will serve to keep this section warmer as the cold, north winds howl.

Running east and west, the barn will be covered with 2 layers of 6ml. plastic...just like a greenhouse. Across the most easterly portion, is the milking parlour which is capable of milking 9 cattle at once; four on one side and five on the other. The milk house is incorporated into the frame but is in fact an enclosed, separate building nestled in the barn proper. "It is the only part of the barn that is heated," notes Bart. The heating is the in-floor type, radiating warmth from the cement upwards, the most effective method and a very efficient way as well.

The barn is freestall and the bovine will be free to move in and out in nice weather as they choose, except at milking time.

During the cold winter months they will be able to take advantage of a "bedding pack" in the one section of the barn. This is a portion which is layered in straw to provide a restful and clean environment for the herd. The hay lines the north wall of this section and will thus provide some extra warmth as the cattle rest. "Resting after milking is encouraged since the teats need time to seal up after milking, and a full and rested

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PULL-OUT SECTION

High-tech farming in Matilda

by Sandra Lee Johnston
Chieftain Staff Reporter

Arriving at the Tibben Farms Inc. located just east of Brinston on a day when things seem to have settled somewhat from the last time this reporter was there, the password is activity. Harvest time is a busy time and with construction not yet complete, the Tibben family is occupied with those fall things that all farmers deal with late in September. Added to these chores are those items not yet installed, operational or ready to work in the new barn.

The pump is being upgraded to accommodate the extra work it will need to accomplish when the new barn is fully operational. Thankfully the sunshine and warmer temps provide the perfect setting to get things done. The electrician is hard at it inside splicing wires and such. (I am not very technically knowledgeable).

Entering the barn, now with bovine residents, things seem to be coming together as it were. As the cattle mill about, checking their new surroundings, they are not as nervous as might have been thought. They seem to be settling in just fine to their new environment.

Ralph explains that the family has been busy showing folks through even though the "open house" is over. He smiles and notes it is indeed a showplace of the newest technology on the market and notes,"We enjoy having people come to see what they too can do."

Someone said that "Patience is a virtue," and the Tibben family is finding out that indeed it is a good thing as they show people through, even those who have been through before and want another look.

There is a justifiable excitement in his voice as he points to the "mats" which the cattle are relaxing on. Afterall, this is some set-up! "The mats are just great, not only for us, but for the animals...they provide a great place for the cattle to lay, and it is vital to production that they can relax; but, the fact that they are also easy for animals to maneuver on, getting up and down is nicer for the cattle. There is what we call "lunge space" in the stalls too. The cattle can put their heads anywhere and get up with the least amount of hassle."

The alley scraper works at seven feet per minute, and we hope to have it operational every four hours when things are ready. The outdoor storage pit can hold the manure from 200 cows for just over 200 days. "It fills from underneath (gravity flow) and is agitated continually so the smell is not as bad as it would be otherwise."

Mike joins us and Ralph leaves to tend to filling the bunk silos. "Mark is away at Kemptville College," explains Japke (his mom).

Mike tells this reporter that indeed farming is a big business and the theory that is learned at College is valuable, but notes, "Nothing takes the place of practical experience on the farm."

He shows us the insulated curtain panels, covered in a tarp-like material with R12 styro-sheets inside the double layer, which are controlled by thermostats. "We set the temperature and it stays about where we want it, between 5 and 6 degrees Celsius. We are not trying to keep it too hot, just ensure that it does not freeze in here." Mike tells us that the south side is controlled automatically while the others are manually taken care of. "There should be no sudden temperature changes in the barn," another small detail that helps production stay at a high level. "There are clear panels which allow more light through, but do not have the insulation value, and there is one that does not have any R-value, but provides only relief from the wind. These last two are cheaper, but do not do what we want them to."

He continues to point out the chimneys in the roof that ensure continual air movement throughout the barn. "They are always sucking air and keeping things fresh."

The animals seem contented. A new environment bathed in cleanliness and sunshine where they are protected from the weather, they should be "at home" in no time.

New to the Tibben family is the drive through feeding which is monitored and computerized. "The feed is mixed and fed as we drive along. We select what we are feeding and the computer does the rest. The wagon has a read out that keeps us attuned to what is happening. We used the conventional method of feeding in the old barn, so we are still learning about this." He adds how important it is to feed the cattle and get them laying down as soon as possible to ensure maximum production. The computer guage on the wagon front is impressive, like a lot of things in this barn.

"This set-up means more management, but with fewer manpower hours per cow," says Mike. He takes the reporter into the milk storage area and then into the high tech milk parlour. Showing the plate cooler he explains that the water is pulled from the well and the plates cool the milk almost instantly...vital to ensure the milk is cooled as fast as possible. The milk is bottom fed into the tank. According to Mike, "We do not want any more agitation of the milk than absolutely necessary...the more we move it about, the more risk of it going bad." The tank is cooled as well from the bottom, so the milk is kept as cool as possible at all times. The water then goes to a storage tank under the building, is gravity fed to the barn and in turn to the cattle.

A Therma Stor-heat recovery system coupled with a condensing unit circulates the water, takes the heat from the milk as it does so and heats the water which is recovered. The cows thus get lukewarm water to drink, which of course they enjoy...more so in the colder weather for sure!

It was explained also that as the cows move out of the milking parlour via the "return lane" they can be treated with antibiotics or their hooves can receive copper sulphate (hardens them), and they move to the feed alley and then lay down (teats need to seal up before the cattle lie down and this

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Milk parlour computerized

Part of the milking of the herd at Tibben Farms Inc. will be a matter of punching the correct data into the computer. The parlour is a masterful piece of engineering and watching the cows being milked will be a treat. Here some farmers show their interest in the arrangements.

Chieftain photo by S.L.Johnston

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Farm vacations no bull

Vactioners travelling in the winter months may decide to get away from the hustle and bustle of the hectic Christmas season with a holiday to the farm. The countrysides of rural Ontario are truly a beautiful site in the winter season especially with the new fallen snow giving everything a magical and mystical look. Take along your skates and go skating on the pond, enjoy skiing in the bush or tobogganing down the barn hill! Perhaps you'd like to experience farm living at its busiest season - the summer! The farmers will be busy harvesting their golden crops and running the daily operations of their farms. You could even have the opportunity to lend a helping hand with the chores or enjoy peaceful walks down country roads and relax under the shade of an old oak tree or gaze at the brilliant stars from the farmhouse front porch. why not visit an OFCA farm in the spring and celebrate its arrival from the farm. Children will love to see all the new born farm animals. Watch new born lambs frolic in the meadow, baby chicks chirp with delight and baby colts run along a path.

Farm holidays are also very appealing because they provide an economical way for families and vacationers to travel throughout the picturesque country sides of rural Ontario. Bed and Breakfast prices range from $30 to $75 for a double, while farm vacation holidays (3 meals a day and accommodation for a week) begin at $155 per adult. But most importantly farm holidays are fun and educational at the same time!

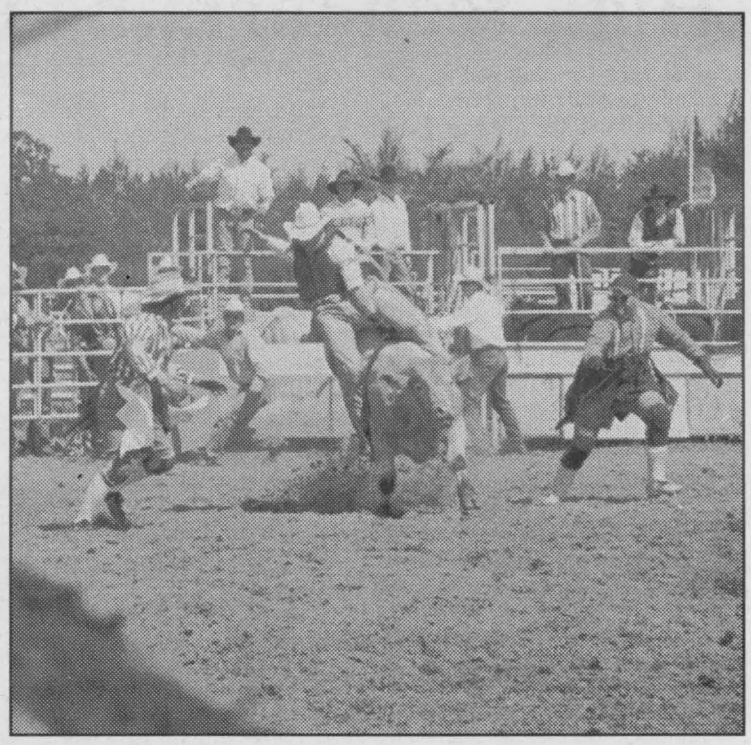
All of these adventures and memories and so much more can be discovered with a visit to an OFCA farm. The Ontario Farm & Country Accommodations annually publishes a directory that lists and describes each of the farms and also outlines farm and local community activities. From the directory vacationers can choose any one of the OFCA's charming country Bed & Breakfast and Farm Vacations to hideaway and escape to rural Ontario. the OFCA members offer 3 types of accommodations:

1) "At home accommodations" include meals and lodging and guests usually live in the farm house and share their meals with the farm family.

2) "Separate accommodations" on the farm in cottages or second farm homes with housekeeping and kitchen facilities. Guests may also rent separate housing, prepare their own meals and look after their own housekeeping needs. Guests are welcome to join farm activities when possible.

3) Bed & Breakfast lodging includes one nights lodging and breakfast. Guests are asked to arrive after the evening meal and to depart in the morning unless additional meals have been requested in advance.

Directors are available for free pick-up at local Ontario Ministry Agriculture and Food offices or by calling 1-800-567-8898 or 1-800-668-2746 or 1-416-326-3400 and asking for an Ontario Farm and Country Accommodations Brochure. Or by mailing a self-addressed $2. stamped envelope to: Sharon Grose, OFCA Executive Director - Request, R.R.#2, Alma, Ontario N0B 1A0



No bull...

Pictured above the gentleman on this bull was having few problems keeping his seat for eight seconds! The 1st Ottawa River Rodeo Association rodeo in Dundela last month was a huge success and organizers are sure they'll be back next year.

Chieftain photo by M.C. Bailey.

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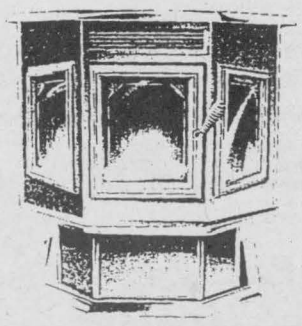

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Blooming business growing for young female entrepreneur

by Sean McKibbon
Chieftain Staff Reporter

While her friends sought their future at college or university, Koren Brown was planting hers in the soil. What started out as a way for her to earn a little extra pocket money turned into a thriving small business in cut flowers and bedding plants.

"I originally started with vegetables because Dad didn't want me to get an off-farm job. He didn't say no, but he frowned on it because somebody had to be here in the summer to hay." So the Hyndman Road resident turned to selling vegetables at the Prescott Market Garden.

Starting with what the now-21-year-old calls a "very large garden" her business has grown to include three greenhouses with plans for a fourth.

"I didn't know if I wanted the bedding plants or not, but then the opportunity arose to buy the greenhouse, so I thought, 'What the heck I'll give it a try.' A year ago it was really good -- the season -- so I thought, 'Well, I'll put up another small one.' And then again this year it was that much more successful and I'm going to put another one up right away."

The expansion of her business hasn't come without work or help. The Brown family and Koren's boyfriend have all pitched in. It took two weeks for Miss Brown and her boyfriend, Nordhoff Manneck, to transplant 30,000 plants this year. Her family takes part in the care of the plants and allows her to use their land.

"I think the good times are behind us as far as jobs are concerned," says Koren's father Daryl Brown. "I think if there's going to be a future for young people, they're going to have to make it on their own like Koren is doing. I'm delighted that she's able to do it here on the farm."

But the relationship between father and daughter is not without tensions.

"I offered Dad a partnership two years ago to milk with him and he wouldn't take it. He said he didn't want to answer to me," she laughs a little nervously and pushes back a whisp of her reddish brown hair from a shoulder. "That's fine. So I just said, 'Well I'm going to concentrate on the business and don't expect me to be there to milk twice a day, if I'm not going to get anything out of it. It was fine when I was 16 when I started the business and it was a little sideline... but now it's turned into a full fledged business."

Her garden has expanded to almost a third of an acre and next year she hopes it will be as large as three acres. Miss Brown says she moved her cut flowers to the Manneck's property because her father wouldn't give her any more land.

"I do chores every night during the week, but my business has priority." She says that even though there are times when balancing the two becomes frustrating her father still supports her. Miss Brown says there are special times too during the year when her parents know she is busy and allow her to concentrate on the task at hand. Like preparing bedding plants for the market.

Eventually, she hopes, the business will become independent of the Market Garden. Roadside sales are less labour intensive, she says.

"You work until about 11 o'clock getting ready at night and you get up at five in the morning to be on market and it would be nice if I could establish this location or at my boyfriend's. I don't want to totally lose market either because it's an excellent connection with the public. You get a lot of advertisement out of it."

The Prescott Market Garden, she says, is well established with tourists, campers and boaters making up much of the customer demographic. But the market's real staple customers are Prescott's seniors.

"One day when two bus loads of a senior citizen's group left Prescott to go on some bus trip everybody just sat and looked at each other on Market. Some days it's incredibly frustrating and other days it's great, you love it. But there are some days you get up and say what am I doing this for? But I think that comes with any business. You have to take the ups with the downs."

Miss Brown is now taking a floral arrangement course at Algonquin college. She says that it's part of her next plan for her business.

"I want to get into doing weddings. Some people say that brides are hard to work with, but that's just something you've got

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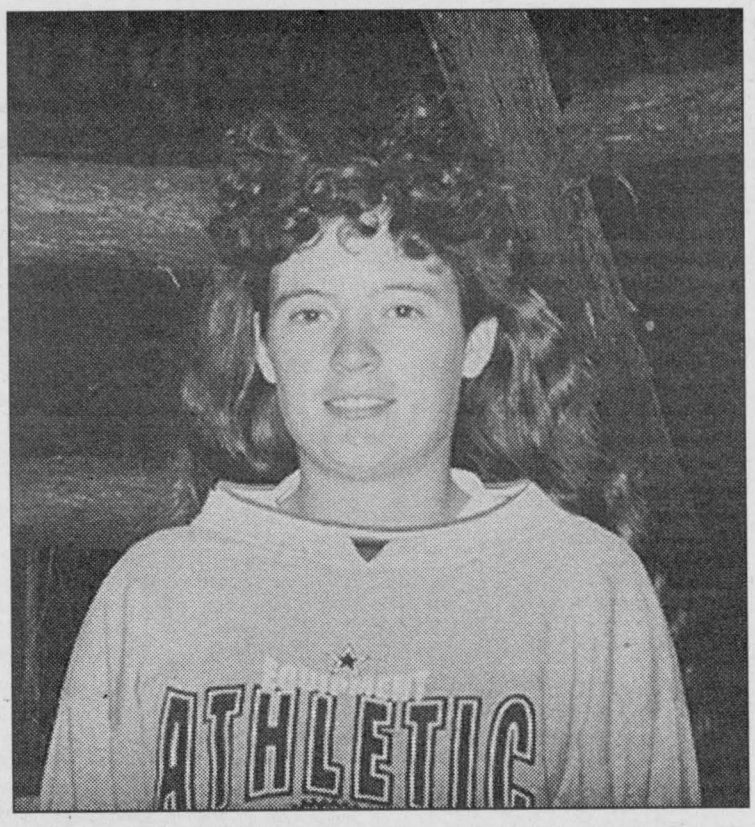

Growing flowers *Chieftain photo by S. McKibbon*

Koren Brown started growing flowers when she was 16 and the hobby has turned into a successful business for the Hyndman Road resident. Koren, pictured above, sells her product at the Prescott Market Garden.

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OFA calls for Farm Property Tax Reform

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is proposing a five-point plan to reform Ontario's outdated farm property tax system.

Details of the policy option are contained in a special supplement to the September 10, 1996 issue of Farm & Country, being distributed to 55,000 rural subscribers.

The OFA calls on the provincial government to meet its commitment and continue the Farm Property Tax Rebate Program until genuine property tax reform eliminates the need.

In its proposal, OFA recommends the province take the following steps to achieve permanent, fair property tax reform:

- remove all of the people services as welfare and education from property tax
- assess agricultural property according to its productive use as farmland
- create a new mill rate for farmland and outbuildings set at a value of 25% of the residential mill rate
- enact a long-term commitment to compensate municipalities that experience significant revenue shortfalls as a result of tax reform on farm property.

"Farmers want fair treatment, not special treatment," said OFA President Tony Morris. "This solution is simple, practical and fair for all Ontarians. Under the mill rate option, the amount of tax paid on farmland will be balanced with the amount of municipal services consumed."

The five-point plan was developed by OFA to address longstanding inequities in Ontario's property tax system. Successive governments have recognized that productive farm assets bear an unfair burden of taxation and implemented the Farm Property Tax Rebate Program in 1970 as a temporary measure to level the playing field for farmers and other ratepayers.

Morris is calling for an all-out lobby effort by 40,000 OFA members to put the reform proposal on the agenda of municipal politicians, rural MPPs and Cabinet.

"It's time we fixed this problem once and for all," said Morris. "Let's push the government to deal with the root of the property tax reform issue and let us get on with the business of farming."

The OFA plan takes into account the needs of all rural residents. It recognizes that a long-term commitment from the provincial government is necessary to compensate those rural municipalities which experience revenue shortfalls as a result of property tax reform.

"We think our proposal meets the provincial government's own criteria for fairness in tax reform," added Morris. "We strongly urge the Crombie panel to adopt these measures for the tax treatment of Ontario farmland as it conducts its review of the delivery and funding of government services."

CONTINUED

Blooming

Continued from page 4

to deal with. And it will mean that all my income isn't limited to just twelve weeks a year."

Obviously proud of his daughter's accomplishments, Mr. Brown says of his children, "We always knew they had potential. When they were younger they always seemed to have the ability to work and make things happen on their own." It is a lesson in responsibility that Mr. Brown thinks is sadly lacking in the lives of many young people. He says that farm life has a gentler pace in spite of its hard work. "The kids never got involved with drugs or any of the other foolishness a lot of city kids get into partly because they didn't have time for it. I think that they're happier and I think that part of the reason an individual gets into something like drugs is if they're not happy with their surroundings."

Miss Brown agrees, "Working on a farm teaches you to work towards your goal. It teaches you that you have to work before you can enjoy yourself." She says that someday when she has children of her own she wants to raise them on a farm. "Some people don't understand it. It's a good life but it isn't an easy one."



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CONTINUED

Tibben

Continued from page 2

can happen as they eat). As they move from the parlour, they can be herded into a large, box stall, just below and off to the east to have their hooves trimmed. A cow in heat can also be isolated here until things cool down. Less disruptive to the herd in general, she can be alone for a while.

Mike notes that there are five farms within a one hour distance with similar systems in operation; "Carl Sears has a similar system, he milks double six in his parlour; and Pateneaudes near Embrun have space for a herd of 250. Glausers (3rd concession in Matilda) are expanding in the near future with a set up very much like ours as well." He adds that many farms in the Winchester and Chesterville areas are a lot the same as this.

Japke has stayed with us for the tour, and now adds that it was fascinating for her that all the cement was poured; at the same time for the barn. "A pumper truck pumped the cement throughout the area in one continuous flow. Two trucks can dump into the pumper at once." It took 27 loads of cement for the floor of the manure pit alone! She adds, "Seeing 8 cement trucks all converging on the yard at the same time was an awesome sight."

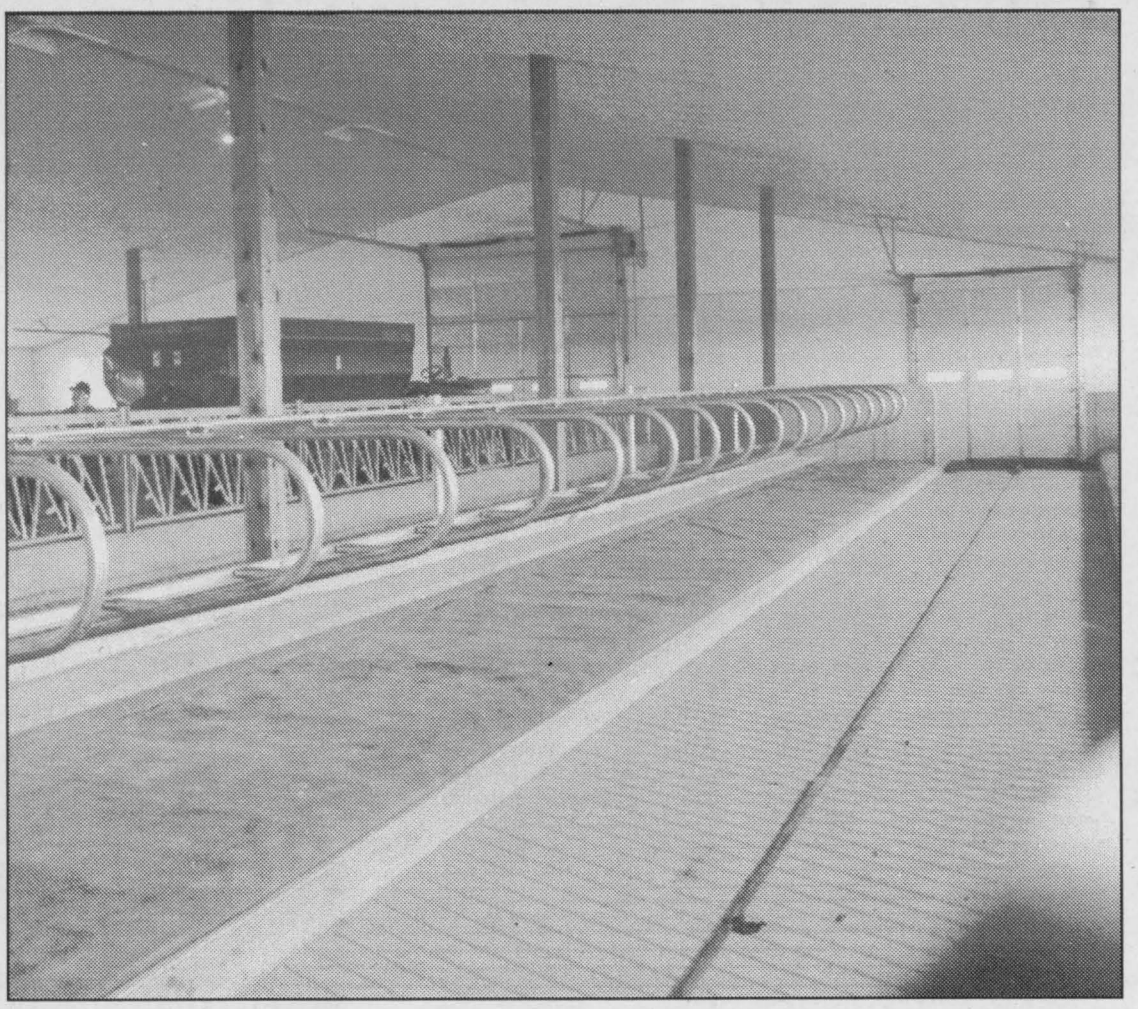
Going outside, the harvesting operation is in full swing as the bunker silos are being filled. These "commodity bays" allow for the silos to be filled in a shorter time. "The manpower remains the same, but we can get things done more quickly than previously," says Ralph.

The old barn stands looking dejected and lonely. Within sight and footsteps of the new structure, it is not forgotten. "We will use it for heifers now and when we reach capacity in the new barn, we will utilize the old one as a maternity area," says Mike.

As we step into the sunlight, Mike notes that the new driveway meets and may even exceed the new standards required for milk pickup. "The old driveway was not satisfactory, we would have been looking at upgrading it."

The colour of the new barn may well tell of the future of the business. All barns used to be red; this one is a butterscotch colour and as we stand surveying the sand, stone and huge rocks, Japke is thinking outloud..."Landscaping will be a challenge, but I have some ideas that will be exciting to try." We will be back in the spring to see how she makes out and how the entire operation is running.

Good luck is extended as the Tibben family faces the challenges their new operation will present during the months ahead. Keep smiling, it helps!



Some new pad!

Here is a glimpse of the new freestall arrangement at Tibben Farms Inc. The cattle lie on the mats which provide stable footing and ease of lowering as well as making the getting up safer and easier. A comfortable set up, they should be an intrigal part of giving the "girls" an environment that will encourage consistant milk production. A very state of the art system will keep things on an even keel, and provide a showcase of new products available to farmers in the new age.

Chieftain Photo by S. L.Johnston

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CONTINUED

Biemond

Continued from the front

animal produces more," assures Bart.

The openness is evident in this barn and, while the day we visited the sun was shining and the temperatures in the high teens, the cold throws of a Canadian winter will cool things down for sure. Bart reassures us that this is not a problem, but rather, a bonus in disguise. "There will be less chance of disease in the herd, as in a "normal" barn where the heat can become a breeding ground for bacteria, we do not have such a worry."

"Anyone who enjoys working in the barn in shirt sleeves would not like our set-up, but we think it will keep us moving and refreshed as we go about our tasks. It will not freeze us, we will need to dress for the temperature, that is all."

Cement pillars hold the outside frame in place and the cement slabs which run the entire length of the barn provide for drive-through feeding, and easy clean up behind the animals.

Bart explains that this type/style of barn is much cheaper to build than the conventional style and serves the exact same purpose. Since the family did the actual labour in building the barn, it is tough for Bart to estimate with any degree of accuracy, what the barn cost them, but he takes a stab and guesses, "Somewhere in the range of $75,000."

The upkeep will be no more than would be expected, the bolts and nuts which hold the frame need to be checked and replaced as they rust or just tightened when they loosen up. The plastic which will become the walls and roof of the barn is guaranteed for 8 years. "A greenhouse which is covered in plastic is guaranteed for 5 years, and the humidity and plants, watering and so on cause the yellowing effect which rots the covering faster than it will on a barn, and as Bart tells us, "The cost of replacing the entire plastic covering on the barn is in the neighbourhood of some $1500", nothing to be concerned about in a farming operation of this size.

Running the length of the barn, between the modular sections, is a deep eaves trough which is designed to take the run-off from the roof. Hollow stems carry the excess away from the troughs and while some who have looked at the barn have expressed concern about the ice build up and the run off caused from it, or the possibility of breakage due to ice build-up, Bart assured us that the body heat from the cattle and the activity within the structure will take care of these worries. "Dad saw one of these barns in operation and he would not have taken the chance on one if he were not convinced it will work effectively all year round."

The barn is designed to hold young stock and the milking cattle as well, so it seems very versatile and most functional. "It is built in such a way that an addition poses no problem, we can just add as much as we need for our needs at almost any time we want to,"says Bart, "It would be no problem."

The Biemonds farm is comprised of 185 acres more or less, 154 being tilled at the present time. "The barn has the capacity to function effectively with a herd of 90 to 100 cattle, so if we decide to grow, there is no worry as far as the barn is concerned," adds Bart.

Three bunk silos hold the feed which will be used this season by the farm, easily accessible and a great way to manage the feed stores, Bart shows how the old tires keep the weather from affecting the silage...great use of old rubber.

While the plastic is not all in place yet, the milking parlour is covered and operational. The milk house looks as if it has always been there, complete with landscaping...the fall colours add that splash of gold and red that makes even a barn seem homey.



Farming can be unique

The galvanized steel frame of Peter Biemond's new "Greenhouse Barn" glistens in the sunshine. The Biemond family will soon cover the entire frame with heavy guage plastic and welcome their milking herd indoors for the winter. This unique style of barn has more than one person stopping for a second look. A more cost effective structure than most conventional barns, everyone is anxious to see how the operation works during the colder months. *Photo by S.L.Johnston*

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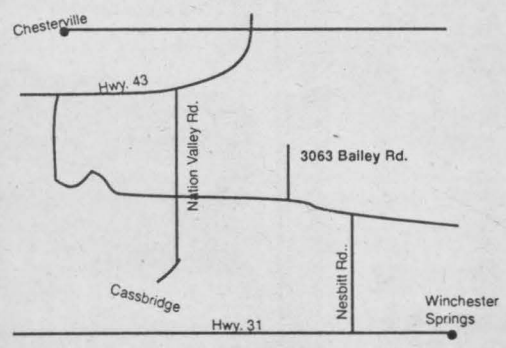

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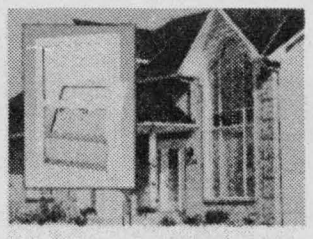

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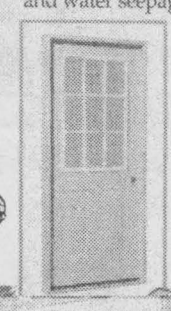

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