

# Organic Production

## Feature Farm

### Segalla Farms

By Lisa McCrory

#### About the Farm

Rick Segalla and his family own and operate a 900 acre farm of which 300 are wooded and the remaining tillable/open land is used for corn silage (74A), soybeans (63A), Alfalfa (95A), grass hay (72a) and pasture (160A). They have 115 milking cows and an equal number of young stock and are starting to raise some beef animals as they contemplate starting an organic beef business. Most of the cows are Holsteins, though there are some Holstein/Jersey and Holstein/Hereford crosses in the herd.

Rick's great grandparents on his mother's side were the first owners of the primary farm. Prior to purchasing the farm, they worked for the owners and when the farm came up for sale they pulled their resources (rather creatively, but that is another story) and became the proud new owners. Over the years, the farm grew; pieces of land would come up for sale and today the farm consists of pieces of land from 8 different farms. Rick's parents bought the farm in 1949 and in 1979, Rick and his brother bought the cows and took over the farm. Two years later, Rick bought his brother out. The farm itself is a corporation owned by Rick and his siblings. A second and separate incorporated business owned by the family members is a gravel business, which totals about 100 acres of the farm property. Rick loses a little land here and there when some of the gravel acreage needs to be put into production.

Cows are housed in a freestall barn, bedded with sand, and milked in a double six parlor. At one time, he was milking 200 cows 3 times a day, but reduced his cow numbers to match the readily available pas-

ture on the farm as the cost for land (to purchase or rent) is incredibly high in his area. At one time Rick mixed lime in with the sand, but the pH of his soil went over 7.0 and his Magnesium levels (high Mag lime) were way out of balance with his calcium, so this practice had to end.

#### Transitioning to Organic

The transition to organic production practices started in 1994 when Rick decided not to buy chemicals for his land and purchased a cultivator to take care of his crop needs. This change was initiated partially due to finances.

Rick was having problems with stray voltage and needed to cut back on expenditures while he resolved that problem. In 1997, with stray voltage behind him, a healthy herd and a promising market, Rick decided to transition his herd to organic and was certified by 1999.



#### Feeding cows and calves

During the winter months, the cows are fed a corn silage/haylage/16% grain TMR (Total Mixed Ration). All but 6 lbs of grain is mixed into the TMR and the rest of the grain is offered in the parlor; 3 lbs per milking per cow. During the summer time, cows go out to pasture and have the option to return to the barn for a small amount of TMR. When the cows are on pasture, the % protein in the grain goes down to 12%. The TMR is fed out three different times over the day meaning that the feed gets cleaned up quickly, the cows are not slug feeding any one type of feed, and they are encouraged to go to pasture and graze in order to get their fill.

Calves are raised in groups of 4-6 and are fed milk from a bottle at the beginning and then learn to drink out of pails. Rick used to use nipple barrel feeders but had sucking problems and as a result has some 3-titters. Once he changed to a bucket feeding system, the sucking problems went away. From day one, the

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calves are offered hay and at 30 days, they are offered grain. The calves are weaned at 60 days and are out to pasture between 6-9 months of age depending on the time of year.

Rick has been growing soybeans for 2 years now and it is still undecided as to whether this crop will be a true part of the cropping system. This year with the excessive rain, the soybeans have been under water twice, affecting the yields. The intention with this crop is to sell the human grade beans to the high end market and roast the second rate beans and feed them to his cows. The income from the beans that he sells will go towards feed costs and the soybeans that he feeds his cows will reduce the protein needs from his purchased grains, thus contributing to the costs of purchased feeds in two ways.

### **Basic Farming Philosophy and Attention to Herd Health**

“You need healthy soils to produce healthy crops and pastures”, says Rick. Once you have that, you are sure to have healthy cows. Rick is not afraid to have a couple weeds in his feed; “it provides a broader spectrum of minerals in the diet”, says Rick.

Strategies for herd health are rather simple on this farm: Rick has a closed herd except for the occasional bull, calves are vaccinated for pink eye and given the 9-way vaccine at pasture time, herd health checks happen twice a year, hoof trimming happens as needed and they use DHIA as a farm management/record keeping tool. The cows do not get regular vaccinations and at this point, he has not had any problems. Cows are bred naturally with Holstein bulls (and the occasional Hereford bull that sneaks over from their small beef herd). Traits that he breeds for are longevity and good production traits. The bull will spend its first season with the heifers, then will graduate to the cows during the second season and will go down the road after that.

Somatic Cell Count usually runs between 180,000 – 250,000 and for the occasional mastitis case, Rick has had success using acupressure which he first learned about after seeing a presentation by Dr Richard Holliday.

### **Milk Market**

At this time, Rick sells his milk to Calabro Cheese, a 43 year old family owned and operated Italian Cheese company located in East Haven, Connecticut ([www.calabrocheese.com](http://www.calabrocheese.com)). Calabro specializes in producing the following Italian cheeses: Ricotta, Ricotta

Impastata, Mozzarella Fior Di Latte, Grated Parmesan and Romano cheeses; and a line of select specialty cheeses which includes scamorza, caciocavallo, burrini, smoked mozzarella, fresh basket cheese, and queso blanco. At this time, Rick is the only producer providing this company with organic milk. The rest of the milk purchased is promoted as 100% natural for their Italian cheeses lines.

### **Involvement with NODPA and Looking into the Future**

Rick has been involved with NODPA since the first annual (2001) NODPA Field Days, which took place at Roman Stoltzfoos’s farm in Pennsylvania. Rick became a NODPA Representative in 2001, has not missed a single Field Days event and is an active Board member.

Rick currently employs 2 workers to run the farm with him and one of his daughters helps with the book keeping. He has 4 children between the ages of 21 and 32 and is open to any or all of them returning to the farm some day. There are many directions that this 3<sup>rd</sup> (and almost 4<sup>th</sup>) generation farm could take including developing a beef market or bottling milk. Only time will tell. ♦