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The Growers Solution

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THE VALUE OF FEEDING GROWERS

By Aaron L. Widrick,
New York Representative

We've been a family farm since my grandfather purchased the home place in 1927. I am in a partnership with my father and brother in Valmont Dairy which is located near Lowville in northern New York State, about 90 miles north of Syracuse. We farm on 540 total acres, (56 are rented) 290 of which are tilled. We grow an alfalfa-grass mixture and small grains-wheat, oats, and barley. The barn has 94 tie stalls where we feed wet round bales, dry hay, and purchased custom formulated concentrate.

We were looking for an alternative to dry fertilizer and had tried several liquids, but we were not pleased with the results. In 1992 the then district manager introduced us to Growers and we tried a small amount on the hay fields. One of our biggest hang-ups was the cost of Growers compared to other liquid fertilizers, but I now realize you get what you pay for. In the spring of 1993 Larry Bixby, Jr. stopped by to introduce me to John Sensenig who had recently taken over as district manager. John went on to explain the quality, balance, and purity of Growers Nutritional Solutions. I was still reluctant to believe Growers could be that good, but I purchased a small amount again for foliar feeding.

In the spring of 1995 John approached me about becoming the Growers sales representative for the Lewis County, area and I reluctantly agreed, because by then Growers was starting to make sense to us.

Following a winter 1996 customer meeting we started feeding all the milking cows 2 oz. of Growers per day. At the same time we removed all the dry minerals except calcium, salt, selenium and vitamins A.D. and E. from the feed rations of all the milking cows, dry cows, and heifers. In December 1997 we increased to 3 oz. of Growers per head per day. All new born calves are started with 1/2 oz. of Growers per day. All heifers and dry

cows have free choice to Growers by using lick wheels. Dry cows receive no added salt; heifers receive 1/2 oz. salt per day.

We have used 3 methods of feeding Growers:

- 1) Currently we use a gallon jug with a dispenser pump.
- 2) TMR application - spray on 3 oz. of Growers per head per batch when loading the mixer with high moisture corn or other wet ingredient and thoroughly mix.
- 3) Metering into the watering line.

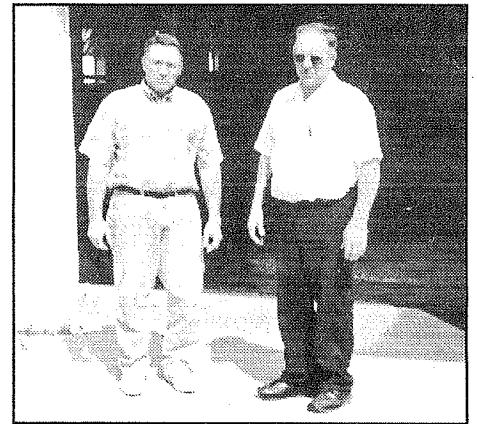
Before we started feeding Growers in early March, 1996 our February, 1996 herd average was 20,865#, 3.8 fat, 3.2 protein, 14.0 month calving interval, and the average body weight of all milking animals was 1190 pounds.

Our November, 1998 herd average was 23,399 pounds, 3.9 fat, 3.4 protein, and the milking animals averaged 1310 pounds. This is a 2534 pound increase in milk and a 120 pound increase in average herd body weight in two years and ten months. Current herd calving interval is 13.9 months. We milk 2 times a day with less than 2% of the herd receiving BST.

We did install a stray voltage system in October, 1996 and an ultra violet light in the water system in March, 1998. To be fair these changes have had a positive effect on overall herd increases, but in my opinion Growers fed as a mineral supplement vs. dry mineral has had the largest effect on vet costs and forage-to-concentrate ratio.

Vet costs in 1994 and 1995 on the dry mineral program were \$18,463.01. Vet costs in 1997 and 1998 on the Growers Program were \$13,572.55 - a savings of \$4,890.96. This amounts to a 26% reduced cost over a two-year comparison.

Our forage-to-concentrate ratio on the dry mineral program was; forage 40% , grain 60%. On the Growers Program as of December, 1998 our ration is 55% forage and 45% grain. This is an estimated cost savings in



Aaron Widrick on left and John Sensenig,
Growers District Manager for Central NYS

concentrate of \$8-\$12,000 per year. Grain costs effect these numbers.

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Value Of Feeding

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In today's modern dairy operations cull rate has reached a level of 25-40%. This high rate has become very costly due to the rapid turnover of herds every 2 1/2 to 4 years. Growers fed cattle live longer than the average which allow us additional heifers to sell for dairy replacements. Holstein cows don't reach full milk potential until 4-6 years of age, and the mature age of milking animals is where to most profit per animal is realized. Growers fed cattle can make this happen and are another opportunity and benefit to feeding Growers as a mineral supplement.

Since our Valmont Dairy started feeding Growers we noticed considerable reductions in the following herd health problems:

Retained placenta (Valmont Criteria is after-birth dropped within 24 hours or less. If not by then, it is considered retained) for normal calving (twins and other abnormal calving not included in these numbers). In 1997-109 calving - 6 didn't clean = 6% average. 1998-85 calving - 6 didn't clean = 7% average which is considerably below the Lewis County average.

Foot problems have been reduced; such as lameness, greasy heel, hairy heel warts, foot rot, swelling of leg joints. Other problems have been helped like cystic ovaries, occurrence of milk fever, ketosis, downed cows syndrome, relative digestive problems, and displaced abomasum. These improvements and other observed changes in our dairy herd

we believe have occurred due to Growers quality, balanced nutritional, purity, and nearly 100% availability.

We find our cattle are healthier and have much less stress which reduces calving difficulties such as twisted uterus before calving, backward calves, calving assistance, and pre-fresh UDDER EDEMA. Valmont Dairy has observed a considerable reduction in this area. In some cases as much as 50% reduction. We find we must check calving dates because the animals will calve undetected due to lack of pre-fresh udder size. This benefit has many positive bottom line advantages such as reduced teat injury, lost center ligament, occurrence of mastitis, udder chaffing and sores. These benefits keep cattle in the milking string for many more years.

Manure reduction is best observed and understood from experience. Valmont Dairy has seen at least a 20% reduction in manure over the past 2 years. At the same time we observe cattle contentment, calmness, less nervousness, silky hair coat, brightness of eyes, and improvement in quality of hoof growth.

Preparing this report has been very good for me, because the feeding of Growers has had many accumulative effects which sneak up on you unnoticed. Looking back I'm realizing now the improvements Valmont Dairy has gained over the past 2 years and 9 months are due to the usage of product.

Looking to the future, component-pricing angle is due to take effect nationwide October, 1999. Healthy, balanced cattle will pro-

duce higher component milk and higher milk production per cow.

Also, a note of interest is that on December 17, 1998 we doubled our 3 oz. feeding rate of 6 oz. to all high producing cows and 1st calf heifers. Early indications are favorable with increased milk production at currently 2-3 pounds per cow. We plan to continue the 6-oz. rate due to the positive results. According to our vet the fresh cows' uterus are properly draining out and are quickly getting back to normal size. They are coming in strong in heat 30 days or less after calving which is now normal rather than the exception and is another of the substantial benefits to feeding higher rate of Growers to recently fresh milking cows. Increase amounts of Growers fed to fresh cows above the 3-oz. rate can be determined by the quality of forage, level of production and understanding the Growers product. The best nutritionists available are the cattle standing in your barn. They are talking, but are we listening?

Using Growers as a mineral supplement has tremendous potential for profit in your herd.