

Producer Profile: Pat and Shiela Brehm, Dubuque County

Pat and Sheila Brehm dairy with their five children ranging from 3 to 17 years of age. Their dairy herd has been growing with their family. In 2003, Pat decided to follow Extension's "Millionaire Model Dairy Farms" path to dairy profitability and the process has served his profitability goals very well.

In 2003, the Brehm's were milking about 60 Holstein cows and grazing "a bit" but after attending Extension's Beginning and Transitioning dairy producer sessions, Pat decided to get more intense with his grazing operation and do some crossbreeding. In consulting with Larry Tranel, Extension dairy field specialist, Pat decided to follow Tranel's model that other producers he knew benefited well from financially. The Brehms now milk 90 cows with a goal of 120-150 cows like the other model farms. The farm went organic last year.

The model farms milk in low-cost parlors and use TMR's, freestalls and most other farm technologies. A major key to the whole system is the low-cost TRANS Iowa parlor which was the latest edition to the Brehm dairy in 2007.



Photo of Pat in his new parlor which with all new equipment and labor was less than \$2,400 per stall. Depending on equipment and labor needs, some low-cost parlors have been built for \$1,200 to 2,000 per stall. Herringbones can be remodeled for much less to go from 6 to 9 stalls on a side in the same space.

"Larry said I couldn't afford to milk in a stall barn or small parlor at my young age. I was milking less than 30 cows per person per hour in the stall barn. Now with my Swing 16 TRANS Iowa parlor, we'll be able to milk over 120 cows an hour with 2 people or 60 cows per person/hour. Also with Larry's recommendations we remodeled a machine shed and put three rows of freestalls in it and we finished it in the fall of 2005 to prepare for the parlor and added cows. More cattle housing is still in the works," Pat said.

When asked what he thought were some defining features of the parlor, Pat mentions the front chop gate, the simple splash guard and kick rail, the floor slopes, the generous amount of light, the unit swing arms and the pre-cooler. "The stall work is so simply and cheap but fits the cow so well that I am really sold on these low-cost parlors. The chop gate allows me to load and unload cows as fast as any rapid exits I've seen.

The Swing 16 TRANS Iowa Low Cost Parlor and holding area cost under \$75,000 and was built into the existing stall barn. This price includes 16 new units with pulsators, take-offs and swing arms; a pre-cooler; a 10 hp milk pump, a variable speed milk pump, a used 3" line and stainless steel milk jar. A variable speed transfer motor on the milk jar allows the milk to pass through the plate cooler slower to cool better, Pat adds.

Pat credits Extension for being of great assistance with instructing the builders on the importance of the TRANS Iowa parlor stalls design details like the sloped splash guard, the chop gate, the 4' entrance gate and swing arms. "They had a few interesting discussions that I'm glad Larry was there to provide recommendations. A 14' garage door opens the parlor to the cows in the holding area which is a feature Pat loves. It's well lit, shiny and very open.

Pat says "these TRANS Iowa parlors are a great option for these old stallbarns and old herringbone parlors."



A detailed look of the splash guard with an 8" offset from top to bottom, putting the cow real close to the operator. There is a kick rail for safety. The open 4' entrance in the back and the chop gate in front really help throughput. Simple brisket rail in front. "This is the ultimate design for a parlor," says Pat.

For more information and videos on TRANS Iowa Low Cost Parlors, visit the following website: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/dubuque/info/Dairy+Publications.htm> and scroll down. TRANS Iowa Parlors are:

"TRANSforming the Iowa Dairy Industry, one parlor at a time."