



They share their best buys

We asked these four Round Table participants where they get the most bang for their bucks.

WITH today's high production costs, spending your money wisely is more important than ever. Simply said, investments must pay for themselves.

List products and services under \$100.

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: Leatherman multiplier tool has saved me many trips to the shop.

Greenlee electrical tester is a necessity for finding any kind of electrical problem.

First aid services provided by Cintas. Although the initial cost of the cabinets was more than \$100, the monthly service provided in keeping them stocked is well under \$100. It is really nice to know that first aid supplies are on hand.

On our dairy the milkers, feeders, and the herdsman get **\$15 for every live calf that hits the ground.** The employees are trained in pulling calves, and if they encounter a problem, they call for help. This has been a great incentive to keeping a close eye on the close-up cows and making sure calving information gets written down.

FERNJO FARMS: We clip **clothespins** onto the lockup stanchions to identify cows to be checked by the vet.

Satellite provides wireless high-speed internet service.

Head lamp on hats to aid in reading tail chalk early in the morning.

Blue cow chalk on Jerseys. Better heat detection and much easier to distinguish on Jersey cows.

Land O'Lake patron website — access to daily milk weights, temp, bacteria counts, and so forth.

HILLCREST FARMS: Acquire powdered colostrum: Calves have done a lot better, and we have reduced mortality to almost zero.

Ritchie engraveable ear tags. It is easy to make new ear tags when one is lost, and we engrave the sire over the cow's number so we can see a cow's sire without going back to the computer.

We installed **outlets and spotlights on all ATVs** to make cow checking at night easier.

We provide **uniforms and laundry service** for all employees. It makes our employees look more professional, and they do not worry about getting dirty since we wash the clothes.

Organic selenium (cost per cow per day) is one feed additive that has greatly improved our reproduction program. Cows are coming into better heats, and we have less cystic or static ovaries.

JENCK DAIRY: All-West Select Sires **breeding services** and **A.I. matings.**

Diesel fuel additives pay for themselves.

Parlor system check keeps equipment performing properly.

Request your **workmen's comp carrier** to do a free walk through.

Request your **farm insurance carrier** to send a field agent to do a free evaluation of farm buildings to see if your coverage is current.

What about \$100 to \$500 items.

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: Lathem fingerprint

time clock. The machine scans the finger and punches them in and out of work. No more employees punching in and out for each other!

My **dairy consultant** (Rob Davis) fits into this category with his monthly visits. He has been instrumental in the progress of our dairy and helps to extinguish problems that arise.

Currently, we have **ABS breeding** our heifers which are located on a different farm and it is difficult for the herdsman to get over there every day.

Incubator for culturing mastitis. It is convenient and more accurate than the thermos and light we previously used.

We have been using **Quickbooks** for 12 years. It does everything we need it to . . . from writing checks, balancing the books, doing payroll, and even business planning.

FERNJO FARMS: Nutrition consultant — monthly meeting is valuable.

Bookkeeping — twice monthly to pay invoices and file.

Palm Treo phone — sync-ability with desktop computer for contacts, schedules, and cow files.

Computer for **Quickbooks Pro** accounting program which runs our farm's financials.

Microsoft Office — Excel spreadsheet program is useful for many projects.

HILLCREST FARMS: Koster moisture tester is a fast way to check moisture levels in our silage.

We built a **trailer** to haul calves behind our



Car-Min-Vu Farm — The Minnus Family, Webberville, Mich.

"Our Afimilk system is one of the best buys on our farm," says Chad. "It is a huge labor saver, and the more information we have on our cows, the easier it is to make a decision," says the central Michigan dairyman.

Car-Min-Vu Farm is a LLC (limited liability company) owned by four family members: Chad and his wife, Evelyn, along with Chad's parents, Carl and Caroline. Chad, shown on the left, manages the entire operation, while Carl, shown on the right, helps with management deci-

sions, cares for the calves, and runs equipment. Caroline heads up bookkeeping, while Evelyn helps with the books and assists in a variety of farm projects. The farm also employs nine full-time and three part-time employees.

The 680-cow Holstein herd has a tank average of 78 pounds per day with a SCC under 200,000. Cows are housed in 6-row free stall barns and milked three times a day in a double-12 herringbone parlor. The farm has been in the family for 50 years and includes 460 acres with 1,000 rented.



Fernjo Farms — Joey Fernandes, Tulare, Calif.

The Feed Watch program is the best buy for this West Coast dairyman. "The ability to monitor feeder accuracy, adjust ration levels resulting in more consistency in milk components, and overall less shrink and waste are the big advantages," says Fernandes. "It is wireless, and it can monitor a feed truck at multiple locations. Our feeding variance is now under 3 percent," he says.

Joey and his wife, Tawni, own Fernjo Farms. Sons Landon, 18, Preston, 16, and Collin, 13, work on the farm during the summer

and weekends moving feed, cleaning corrals, treating cows, and raking free stalls. There also are 19 full-time employees.

Fernjo consists of three dairies totaling 3,800 head. Dairy 1 has a double-16 parallel with drive through free stall barns for 1,000 Holsteins. Dairy 2 is an 18-stall flat barn with open lots for 700 Jerseys, while Dairy 3 has a double-10 herringbone with drive-thru single free stall barn for 500 Jerseys. Holsteins average 24,700 M, while the Jerseys are at 18,600 on 3x milking.



Hillcrest Farms, Inc. — The Rodgers Family, Dearing, Ga.

"We bought a used trackhoe after paying someone else to clear land for us," says Mark when discussing their best buy. "We have dug silage pits and irrigation ponds, cleared land, and moved 35,000 yards of dirt to construct a new free stall barn. That trackhoe has paid for itself numerous times over in the past three years," says the northeast Georgia producer.

Brothers Mark and Andy Rodgers (shown above) head up the farm team for Hillcrest Farms, Inc., which is owned by father William and the brothers. Andy

manages crops, ongoing construction projects, and farm equipment, while Mark looks after the dairy herd. Mark's daughter, Caitlin, and Andy's son, Joshua, also help out. Nine full-time and four part-time employees round out the crew.

The farm owns 750 acres and rents an additional 500. The 390-cow Holstein herd averages 21,700 M, 787 F, and 660 P on twice-a-day milking. Milking takes place in a contour-30 parabone parlor, and cows are housed on concrete feedlots and pasture. A new free stall barn is being built.



Jenck Dairy — Timothy and Melanie Jenck, Tillamook, Ore.

A PTO generator is the top buy for Tim Jenck. "At the costs of five cows, if the power goes out, I'm good," says the Pacific Northwest dairyman.

The Jenck Dairy is owned by the husband-wife duo of Tim and Melanie Jenck, shown above with daughters Katey, 6, Emma, 2, and Rachel 8. Melanie handles the bookkeeping and occasionally helps with the calf feeding and milking. Tim's father, Ken, serves as the chief consultant. They also have two full-time and one part-time employee.

The Jencks have farms located four miles apart; both take advantage of the regions lush pastures for grazing. The heifers and dry cows facility features free stalls and lockups where long stem hay is fed with grain to supplement grazing.

The home farm has a 200-cow free stall with a double-8 herringbone L-shape parlor. Grain is fed via a computer feeder and long stem hay and sweet corn cannery waste supplement grazing. The Holstein and Jersey herd average 22, 200 M, 874 F, and 696 P.

ATVs. The dam can see the calf and will follow the trailer from the maternity to the transition group.

We built a **calf-feeding trailer** for less than \$500 that stays hooked to a John Deere Gator. We can load it up with all the milk, feed, and water needed to feed 90 calves at once.

DeLaval acid foamer foams down the milking barn and reduces buildup on stainless steel.

Rubber mats, 3/4-inch thick, from Tractor Supply on the floor of the milking pit. Employees love them. They have a nonslip finish and are easier to walk on for your feet and legs while milking.

JENCK DAIRY: Lincoln battery grease gun is easy to maintain equipment.

Micro fiber towels for parlor last a long time.

IBA pro square liners are the best we've used to milk our herd.

Quickbooks software keeps our financials in order.

IBA Assure teat dip and **Udder Gold postdip** help keep our SCC under 125,000.

Speed Queen washing machine cleans barn towels very effectively.

How about the \$500 to \$1,000 category.

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: TMR Tracker by Digi-Star has been a great tool to track feeder accuracy and it gives us more control of how cows are fed.

Microsoft Excel has been a big player in the progress of my dairy. I have done budgets for expansion, cash flow budgets, and bonus calculations for the employees.

Two-way radios for the chopper and trucks. In the past, the person driving the chopper would use hand signals to communicate with the truck drivers. What did we do without them?

Uniform service for the employees is a nice perk. It keeps everyone looking good on the farm.

FERNJO FARMS: PC computer — home, of-

fice, and milk barn all connected through the PC.

DHIA testing tracks individual cows.

Bi-monthly milk parlor maintenance service keeps our parlors running properly.

Weekly vet check helps us stay on top of reproductive issues.

Ovsynch keeps cows on a regular breeding program.

Car-Min-Vu's Top Five Buys

1. *Afimilk is a huge labor saver, and the more information you have on your cows, the easier it is to make a decision.*

2. *As I said before, I don't see how we could keep the farm running without our shop.*

3. *Even though the Leatherman multiplier tool may be one of the cheaper items on the list, I would be lost without it.*

4. *I believe our pasteurizer is an important piece of equipment that protects the health of the whole herd.*

5. *Even though I think our service truck is a luxury item, it has saved a lot of time in repairs.*

HILLCREST FARMS: Monthly fee for Dr. Holly Ballentine, **feed nutritionist**, is the best money we spend on consulting. She works up all feed rations and batch sheets for TMRs so we can focus on other things.

DHIA (per month) is a good record keeping system.

We built a **management rail** ourselves and use it everyday.

We built a **single-cow portable milker** from used equipment. It allows us to milk a weak cow in a stall and not run her to the parlor.

We built a **small shed** with sink and chute to deliver calves. All calving supplies are right there.

JENCK DAIRY: Continuous rubber matting from Daritech placed under the bedding in the hospital pen to keep cows from slipping.

Individual calf stalls from Farmtek helps us raise healthy calves.

Rubber interlocking mats from U.S. Farm Services for the holding pen keeps cows comfortable and provides solid footing.

Government Equip-approved **precast septic tank**, instead of poured in place, to catch runoff from silage bunk effectively controls runoff.

Our local utility gave a rebate for replacement of light fixtures to **AG9000 fluorescent lights** which lowers our energy bill.

List items between \$1,000 to \$10,000.

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: Calf milk pasteurizer: Not only do we have healthier calves in the pens, but it keeps John's in its place on the older animals.

Industrial laundry washer: I spent years buying cheap clothes washers and finally bought an industrial washer. It holds up well to the rigger of washing loads of towels every day.

You may think spending \$4,000 on **payloader scales** to weigh back feed is a little far fetched. However, we do use the scales for other purposes on the farm such as mixing concrete and weighing the last bucket of silage to be dumped in the mixer. The numbers are displayed right in the cab.

Our local hose supplier had an incentive deal

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that if you buy \$3,000 of hose and fittings, the crimper for **hydraulic hose-making equipment** would be free. It was a great value when you consider the crimper was \$1,500. The store now considers me a dealer and I get dealer rates. I can make my own water and air hoses with this unit, too.

On the cropping side, I bought a **light bar** for applying fertilizer, spraying, and planting. The color screen shows me exactly where I have been in the field, and it really cuts down on the overlap and missed spots.

We have gone to buying our **plastic in large rolls** of 56 feet x 1,500 feet. Not only is it cheaper by the square foot, but we don't have any waste because you only cut off what you need.

Fernjo's Top Five Buys

1. The **Feed Watch Program** gives us the ability to monitor feeder accuracy. It is wireless. One single-feed truck can be monitored at multiple dairies. Our feeding variance is now under 3 percent.

2. **PC computer** enables the use of all management programs (DC-305, Pocket Cow, Feed Watch, Quickbooks, milk patron website, and the internet).

3. With our **hoof trimming chute** we can respond immediately to lame cows at one quarter the cost we previously spent on the service.

4. A **single-feed truck** with one feeder for our three dairies, all within one mile of each other, has saved labor.

5. **DHIA testing** allows us to manage cows and cull through milkweight and SCC.

FERNJO FARMS: Feed Watch Program (Valley Ag Software) to monitor cow feeder, ingredient usage, dry matter intakes, and feed efficiency.

Kawasaki Mules which replaced our half-ton pickups for travel on and between dairies.

Pocket Cow Card (Valley Ag Software). This is a handheld PC unit used with RFID tags to identify and enter info at cowside.

HILLCREST FARMS: DeLaval sort gate is a great addition to our Alpro system allowing us to sort cows easily upon leaving the parlor.

DeLaval's **Herdman H.R.S. lot reduction system** reduces the holding pen size and helps get cows into the parlor without additional stress.

DeLaval's "**Smooth Operator**" variable milk transfer unit and milk pump pumps milk from the parlor to the milk tank a lot quieter and with less breakdowns than our old system.

JENCK DAIRY: PTO generator and throw switch keeps our farm running when power is out.

Loop stalls instead of wood stalls provide better cow comfort.

By purchasing the new Westfalia bulk tank, we received a **cooling compressor** at a reduced price.

What about \$10,000 and up?

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: The Afimilk system includes milk metering and heat detecting, making it one of the best buys on my farm. I personally don't think I could manage the dairy without it. The sort gate is a huge labor saver.

Our **service truck** is loaded with a welder/gen-

erator, torches, air compressor, fuel tank, tools, bolts and nuts, and so forth. It is easy to hop in it and go fix equipment.

The **Houle piston pump** has been a very effective, reliable, and low-maintenance way of transferring my sand-laden manure from the barn reception pit to the sand separating equipment.

This winter we decided to convert our old work shop (16 feet x 32 feet) into a **farm office**. Before this office, we had paper work in three different areas. This office gives us a central place where all the business can be done.

We built a drive-through **fresh cow and close-up cow barn**. It has given the cows more space, and it is much easier to handle the close-up cows.

We remodeled the end of our main tool shed into a **shop** (56 feet x 50 feet with a 24-foot overhead door). We do a lot of our own repairs and maintenance work, and the shop makes it convenient, easy, and quick.

FERNJO FARMS: Fans and soakers for heat abatement have easily paid for themselves.

Our **hoof trimming chute** is a mobile chute used with an in-house employee to trim and treat lame cows very cost effectively.

Single-feed truck with vertical-mounted mixer used to feed all three dairies from one commodity barn. It keeps things simple.

HILLCREST FARMS: We bought a used **Sam-sung 280 trackhoe** after paying someone else to clear land for us. The trackhoe has paid for itself many times over the last three years.

Unverferth strip till plow is attached ahead of planters. After switching to strip till, we increased yields by at least 25 percent.

DeLaval's Alpro system allows us to manage the parlor systems and the cows much more effectively and gives us up-to-date info on individual cows and production.

JENCK DAIRY: Local utility gave rebate for replacing old vacuum pump for one with a variable-speed drive.

Daritech's high/low hard hose pressure system has been a great buy.

The ability to get a price for all the **individual commodities** in the grain mix, as opposed to one complete mix bid in the past.

Hillcrest's Top Five Buys

1. **Trackhoe** for clearing land and moving dirt, it cannot be beat.

2. **Unverferth strip till plow** made a dramatic increase in crop yields.

3. **Acquire colostrum** reduced calf mortality and calves are a lot easier to raise.

4. **DeLaval sort gate** easily sorts cows for any reason.

5. **Alpro daily milk weights** allow us to detect any problem cows immediately.

Give us your "wish list"

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: I would like to purchase some **land**. Based on the circumstances in my area, I believe there should be an opportunity down the road. I would also like to add more **manure storage**.

FERNJO FARMS: Milk parlor remodel to help labor efficiency. **Additional sand free stalls**

for cow comfort and increased milk production. **Additional farm land** for manure disposal and forage production. We are just getting started into **hedging** both milk and feed. Based on the volatility we've seen in the past year, it is a must working with our nutritionist.

HILLCREST FARMS: We will be erecting a 364-stall **free stall barn** this November. We will be bedding with sand and it should help with SCC problems. It will also help with keeping cows cooler in summer here in Georgia and out of the mud in winter. We will also be **converting land** presently used for milk cow pastures into irrigated cropland allowing us to triple crop this land with ryegrass, corn, and brown mid-rib sorghum sudangrass. We will also be **digging another pond** to convert another farm we own from dry land crops to irrigated crops with center pivots.

JENCK DAIRY: I would like to **construct a dry cow barn** on the main farm to reduce the stress on the dry cows. I would like to get an **irrigation system** up and going at the heifer facility to get more grass off pasture during summer months.

Jenck's Top Five Buys

1. **PTO generator**. At the cost of five cows, if the power goes out, I'm good.

2. **Assure teat dip** does a great job preparing the cows for milking.

3. **IBA pro square liners** are the best liner I have ever tried.

4. The **Lincoln battery grease gun** saves time and energy when maintaining equipment.

5. **Parlor system checks** maintain the health and milking quality of cows.

What did you give up that you haven't missed?

CAR-MIN-VU FARM: Transporting manure from the reception pit to the manure processing barn with the vacuum truck . . . the reason I like the piston pump so well.

HILLCREST FARMS: Andy and Mark have given up trying to manage everything. We hire good employees and empower them to take charge of their area.

We also **gave up feeding alfalfa hay**. We were having it shipped here but freight has gone up so much we have taken it out of the ration and added more of our own forages.

FERNJO FARMS: Washing cows in the holding pen is a thing of the past with our sand-bedded free stalls. Overall, there has been a drop in SCC.

JENCK DAIRY: I work with a select group of **vendors** instead of spending valuable time with more trying to get a great price.

