

DHIA milk samples used to check pregnancies Half of cows' heat periods missed

By DIETER KRIEG
LANCASTER - If you think you know all there is to know about artificial breeding and heat cycles, you may want to reassess your position after listening to Penn State dairy specialist Harvey Schaefer. The Extension dairyman says one study revealed that between 20 and 30 per cent of artificially inseminated cows weren't even in heat at the time of service. Another report shows that 60 per cent of heats were missed by good herdsmen. One national study tells of dairymen missing 50 per cent of the cows coming into heat in their herds.

There aren't many dairymen around (if any) who will deny that breeding efficiencies are one of their main concerns in maintaining profitable production. Realizing this, Penn State research has studied the problem for years. New concepts are being tried and developed. An example of the latter which is becoming known to a number of Pennsylvania dairymen is the pregnancy check through milk samples. It's still only performed on a limited experimental basis, but the day may arrive when farmers can have pregnancies reported by way of monthly DHIA summaries. In trials conducted at Penn State thus far, DHIA pregnancy checks are 99 per cent correct on negative responses, and 65 to 78 per cent correct with positive results.

Schaefer predicts that the cost of a pregnancy checking program by way of DHIA milk samples would be

"minimal." Great Britain is already offering such a service to dairymen while continuing to study its applications. Similar work is being conducted at Cornell as well.

While some circles of dairymen are discussing the shortening of calving intervals, the Penn State dairy scientist has reservations and second thoughts about it. He would rather see dairymen work on the shortening of long calving intervals within a herd, rather than the herd as a whole. "We shouldn't be as concerned if a cow goes over a 12 to 12½ month calving interval," Schaefer tells Pennsylvania dairymen.

Acknowledging that heat detection can be a real problem, the dairy specialist recommends turning cows out at least once a day and possibly employing heat detection devices.

"Heat detection is most difficult in free-stall barns," Schaefer reports, suggesting that five to ten minutes of heat observation four times a day during times when cows aren't doing anything else will be a step in the right direction. "Look at them first thing in the morning and last at night," he recommends.

Schaefer also urges dairymen not to assume too much from any one thing, such as the time of breeding in relation to time of standing heat. There are too many variables, the specialist explains. Also, there's absolutely no guarantee that the semen is fertile except the reputation of the person you might buy



Harvey Shaffer

semen from. He advises that semen not be purchased second-hand or from third parties. "Buy direct, that's the only safeguard you have," he stresses. "Anytime you go beyond the production source of the semen, you're on the ice," he affirms.

Schaefer, who has devised a unique educational chart for heat cycles which incorporates a series of sliding boards, used the device to illustrate his message on heat detection. He declares that periods of standing heat last 18 hours (plus or minus six hours) on 85 per cent of cows studied. The time to ovulation is another 12 hours, giving an average total of 30 hours from the time standing heat first occurred. Carrying the

illustration further, the Extension dairy specialist points out that the average life of the egg is 10 hours. Bringing the sperm cells into the picture, the dairyman has quite a time range during which he could successfully breed his cow if all systems are functioning normally.

Dairymen and Penn State researchers know, however, that it isn't all that easy. A common error, says Schaefer, is for dairymen to want to breed their cows too early. He recommends that the time of breeding be recorded on breeding charts, not just the day. Also, anytime you see a cow in heat 18 hours after she was bred, it's time to give her a second heat.

"The more accurately you can determine the beginning of heat, the better your chances of settling the cow," says Schaefer. "Know your cows individually," he recommends.

The appearance of blood after breeding is meaningless as far as breeding results are concerned. "It just means the cow was in heat," says the dairy scientist. Recording the blood sightings on breeding charts could be helpful in determining a cow's schedule. Blood should appear 24 hours after breeding if the cow was bred

at the proper time. Cows may still settle if bred after bleeding occurs, but chances are pretty slim.

According to Penn State specialists, the act of breeding may hasten

ovulation. The yellow body on the ovary governs the length of heat periods. Cows do not necessarily come into heat at night, it's just that the most signs of heat occur at that time, says Schaefer.

McGovern disagrees

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senator George McGovern says that the administration arguments being used as justification for thinly veiled threats of a veto if the Congress passes the Senate version of 1977 Farm Bill are specious. "The administration line, which unfortunately has been picked up in news accounts describing the farm bill controversy, is that the bill as passed by the Senate would cost too much. But that argument is simply a straw man."

"In its presentation to the Senate Agriculture Committee, administration representatives time after time said that they were using figures based on the best possible weather and

the worst possible market conditions. Doing so dramatically inflates the cost figures which have no relation to reality."

"Over the five year life of this bill it might be reasonable to believe that those conditions could prevail for perhaps one year out of the five. It is absurd to make decisions based on the historically inaccurate USDA predictions of yields and market conditions."

"I am perfectly willing to debate the merits of the Senate passed version of the Farm Bill. But that debate should be focused on reality. It is safe to say that historically no agricultural support program has ever reached the point of 'maximum exposure'."

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