

Dairy Pipeline

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Cows Are Top Priority

The foundation of any successful dairy farm is a good herd of cows, and good herds don't just happen; they result from good breeding and good management.

In managing a dairy farm, the dairy herd deserves our utmost attention and care. After all, the cattle are our bread and butter. How well we can get them to perform determines how successful we will be as a dairy farmer. Through good breeding we give them the genetic potential for production and functional type; then we have to give the cattle a chance to perform to their genetic potential.

Your profits depend largely on level of production, persistency of production, calving interval and reasonable longevity. Let's look at these in greater detail.

For every extra thousand pounds of production you can get per year from a cow, you will receive about \$120 more income from milk. About half of this additional income, \$60, will be profit. For a 50 cow herd, this results in about \$3000 increased profits per year.

The most profitable time for a cow is in early lactation when she is in peak production. So, persistency of high production is important. This requires a good dry cow program, proper nutrition, a preventative herd health program, and

attention to a lot of small, but important details.

To obtain maximum profits, one must attempt to remove all obstacles that help prevent a cow from reaching her maximum potential. Some of these obstacles can have a permanent lifetime affect on the cow.

Examples of some of these are: 1) severely stunting a heifer during her early stages of growth, 2) scar tissue in the lungs caused by respiratory ailments triggered perhaps by poor ventilation, 3) scar tissue in the udder as a result of mastitis brought on by poor milking techniques, faulty equipment, etc., 4) damages to the lining of the cows' stomach and intestines due to internal parasites, acid-forming rations, etc.

A cow may never fully recover from some of these problems, and thus these problems can place a permanent lid on her potential production.

Calving interval also affects profits. Reducing the calving interval from 13 months down to 12 months for a 50 cow herd averaging 14,000 pounds of milk per cow in a 305 day lactation, increases the annual milk check by about \$6500; this assumes the cows are turned dry after 305 days and their dry period is shortened from 3 months down to 2 months.

This same 14,000 pound herd would average 46 pounds per day per cow in milk for the 305 day lactation

(38 pounds per day with dry cows included).

If these cows milked an average of 33 pounds per day for another 60 days, for a 365 day lactation, the lactation average would jump from 14,000 pounds to 16,000 pounds, but the yearly milk check would be the same; the average daily production per cow in milk would drop to 44 pounds, but the average for all cows, including dry cows, would remain at 38 pounds.

So as we compare lactation averages, we also have to be aware of calving interval.

A shorter calving interval accomplishes several things: 1) it increases daily herd production, 2) it increases the number of calves born, and 3) it increases the number of lactation peaks (profit peaks). To accomplish this requires good nutrition, preventive herd health, and good heat detection coupled with proper insemination.

Longevity is valuable to a point. Because of the costs of raising a heifer to calving age, a cow doesn't return much of a profit until she reaches her third lactation. So, each year you keep her second lactation is a profit lactation, plus her production and profits continue to climb as she approaches maturity.

However, there is also value in rotating some of these good, older cows out of the herd while they still have some sale value, to make room for a younger generation of heifers which should possess even greater

Pennsylvania Forum on Families

The Pennsylvania Forum on Families is urging people across the Commonwealth to hold a local family forum. Citizen input is the key to a set of guidelines and recommendations that reflects the feelings of as many Pennsylvania families as possible.

The York County Extension office has copies of The Pennsylvania Forum on Families' Guidebook. The Guidebook offers tips on

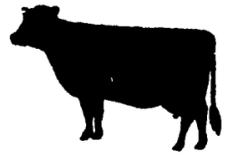
genetic superiority - that is, if they are well-bred.

That brings me to the heifers - another vital link in the profit picture of a dairy farm. Those heifers represent your future cows - your future profits. They may not be earning any cash income and therefore they are easy to ignore, but they are very valuable for what they can contribute to the dairy herd. I mentioned earlier that they should be well-bred and therefore genetically superior to your milking herd.

If you have good longevity in your cows, and if you have few calf losses, you'll be blessed with many replacement heifers. This is very valuable, because with sufficient numbers to work with you can enjoy the luxury of being choosy about which ones you select. Thus, you are in a better position to upgrade your herd rapidly.

Yes, there are many benefits for those dairymen who give cows top priority, attention and care.

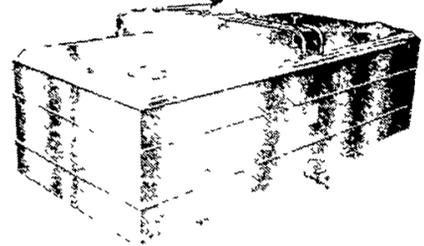
organizing, planning and publicizing a local family forum. To obtain a copy call Joan Lamberson, home economist.



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