

Testing milk protein's profitability

UNIVERSITY PARK — Since some processors are changing their pricing system to include a bonus for high protein milk, it may be economically rewarding for dairy farmers to breed for increased protein content, says Dr. George Hargrove, Penn State professor of dairy science.

Protein content is receiving more attention because more cheese is being produced. Because the protein content is an important factor in determining the amount of cheese made from milk, many cheese manufacturers are willing to pay more for high protein milk.

"Paying a premium for protein has been widely talked about in the industry and several processors are marketing cooperatives, including one in western Pennsylvania, have already adopted the idea," says Dr. Hargrove.

The new pricing system would

not eliminate the fat differential but would work in conjunction with it, Hargrove says.

Look at the pricing system used by your processor and breed for the kind of cows that will provide the most income.

But if you think your processor may begin to pay for high protein milk and you want to begin to breed for protein content, you should begin to do it soon, he says, since calves conceived today will be your milking herd of the future.

Pennsylvania DHIA herds are routinely tested for protein content, so these farmers can begin to make selections for high protein without any further cost.

In recent research, Hargrove looked at two aspects of the protein question. He first looked at it genetically to see the relationship between the protein content and heritability.

Protein, like fat content, is heritable and differs from breed to breed. Protein and fat content are also linked together somewhat so you can not change one factor drastically without changing the other in the same direction.

Then Hargrove examined several pricing combinations each involving the redistribution of money paid for milk to take the protein content into consideration.


The research determined for each pricing combination, the

optimum selection strategy and the expected genetic gains or losses in fat and protein contents and the fluid portion.

Because of the interrelationships between the fat, protein and fluid weight, gains in fat and protein

content usually mean a decrease in fluid weight, or vice versa, depending on the market price.

For it to be profitable to select for high protein content, he says, the protein bonus needs to be near six cents per point.



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(Continued from Page D14)

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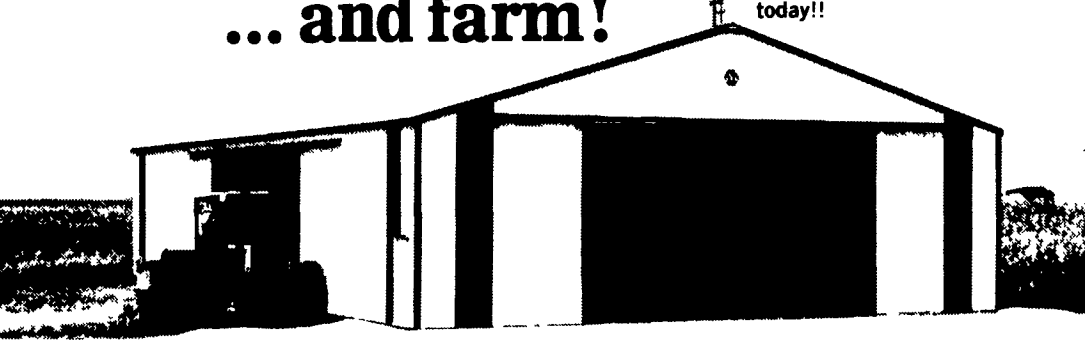
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