

UNIVERSITY PARK — Forecasts for the dairy industry indicate that dairymen will be challenged to be better managers than ever before. Furthermore, the cattle they manage must be efficient producers.

Heifer management is the first crucial step to improving the efficiency and future performance of the herd, according to Michael O'Connor, Penn State Extension dairy specialist. Generally 25 to 30 percent of the replacement heifers are daughters of heifers themselves. This represents a sizable portion of the future herd. Dairymen who are not currently using artificial insemination (AI) for their heifers should consider taking advantage of this management tool. The most recent USDA sire summary indicates that active AI bulls have a 1042 pounds predicted difference milk advantage over non-AI bulls.

By using AI dairymen are making more efficient use of their heifers which are genetically the better animals in the herd, O'Connor said. Using natural service does not allow the

dairyman to reap this potential. Secondly heifer calves resulting from natural service will add very little to the development of the herd.

When a dairyman turns a bull loose with the heifers he is making a number of assumptions. He assumes the bull is fertile, capable of mounting and breeding, free of disease and abnormal traits and does not sire abnormally traits and does not sire abnormally large calves. Assumptions can be dangerous and costly. On the other hand, the AI sire is examined and tested for reproductive soundness and disease.

Semen quality and fertility are routinely monitored. Not only is accurated production and type data summarized for AI sires but calving ease information is also readily available to dairymen. available, the risks involved in a heifer AI program are much less compared to natural service, O'Connor added.

Another advantage of AI is that breeding dates are recorded and calving dates can be more accurately predicted. Thus a

dairyman can better plan and control the time his heifers freshen. Natural service does not allow for accurate record keeping.

Furthermore, an AI program with effective heat detection will allow the dairyman to record breeding dates and determine which heifers are not cycling. Such heifers can be examined by the veterinarian and the problems diagnosed. In a pasture breeding situation these problem heifers would not be identified until considerable time is lost. Such heifers would not be freshening at the optimum age and this is costly in the long run.

Even if a dairyman wants to delay breeding heifers in order that they freshen at the end of the milk diversion program, delayed pasture breeding is not the best alternative, O'Connor said.

Breeding to a subfertile or an infected bull will cause a significant delay in time to conception, much more than the dairyman intended. A better alternative would be to establish an intensive heat detection and AI program for the heifers over a four or five week period.

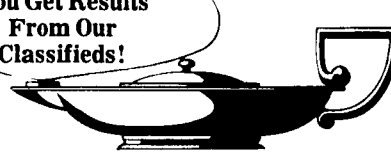
Use of estrous synchronization methods can be very useful in this regard. Breeding and subsequent calving periods can be planned in advance to coincide with milk production or other management

objectives. Remember that heifers are generally the most fertile animals in the herd and very acceptable conception rates can be achieved through AI.

For efficient production in the future, dairymen should seriously consider using AI for their heifers, O'Connor said. Breeding heifers to unproven bulls retards improvement, reduces the number of quality herd replacements and it involves other risks which may be quite costly.

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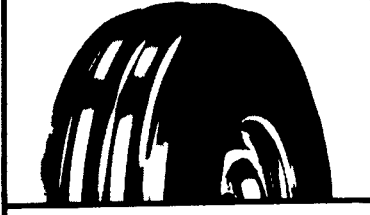
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Ham curing is revised

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Beginning April 15, the U.S. Department of Agriculture started regulating the amount of curing solution in ham and other cured pork products by requiring minimum protein levels.

"USDA has found that measuring protein in the finished product instead of estimating the amount of curing solution used in processing the cured pork products will provide a more accurate basis for determining compliance with the federal standards that assure wholesome, accurately labeled products," said L.L. Gast, deputy administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Previous regulations permitted no more than 10 percent curing solution in a finished cured pork product labeled "Water Added." Under the new regulation four categories of canned ham are allowed and could be labeled:

— "Ham", if the product is at least 20.5 percent protein, the amount previously found in fresh hams;

— "Ham with Natural Juices" if the product is at least 18.5 percent protein, the amount previously found in products labeled in this way;

— "Ham — Added Water" if the product is at least 17.0 percent protein, the level found in hams with 10 percent added solution; or

— "Ham and Water Produce - XX% of Weight is Added Ingredients" for any canned ham less than 17.0 percent protein. The XX would be the actual percent for that product



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