

Heifer management critical when pasturing

UNIVERSITY PARK — To meet the goal of raising well-grown heifers that freshen by 24 months, a farmer cannot afford the setbacks in growth that occur when heifers are left to fend for themselves in far-off, forgotten pastures, says a Penn State assistant professor of dairy and animal science.

All too often, summer-time heifer management involves merely counting the heifers once a week to be sure they're all there, according to A.J. Heinrichs. Pastures can be used very successfully for heifers provided that they are checked daily and concern is given towards feed, fly control and parasites.

Heifers less than six months of age are usually better off to be kept in the barn, Heinrichs says. The digestive system of these young calves is not fully developed to handle high forage diets. These animals rely on getting most of their nutrients from grain. Also, Heinrichs adds, young heifers tend to suffer more from heat, competition from other heifers and parasites.

Dairy heifers that are 6- to 12-months-old can grow very successfully on pasture provided that they are supplemented with four to six pounds of good quality, 16 to 18 percent dairy ration throughout the pasture season.

Heifers that are over 12 months of age will do well on good quality pasture alone in early summer. However, it is important to realize that as pasture quality declines during mid to late summer, heifer growth rates also decline,

Heinrichs says. Normal growth rates can be maintained if hay or silage is provided free-choice to heifers on pasture. Also some grain should be provided depending on the quality of these supplemental forages.

All heifers should have adequate shade and free access to good quality, clean water, Heinrichs adds. Ponds and streams which look good in spring may become stagnant or dried up in late summer.

Fly and parasite problems can also stress pastured heifers to the extent that growth rates are reduced, Heinrichs says. Parasite problems are likely to occur during

a heifer's first season on pasture. Animals that have not previously been exposed to parasites have little to no resistance to digestive tract parasites.

Parasite eggs overwinter on pastures in the northeast. These eggs hatch into larvae under warm, moist conditions in spring weather. Heifers can become heavily parasitized by early to mid-summer. When this occurs, heifers grow slower because they are less feed efficient. They also may develop diarrhea causing them to become anemic.

To avoid the build-up of parasites in heifers on pasture, Heinrich suggests rotating

pastures and avoid overgrazing pastures. Worming at three and six weeks after turnout on pasture will greatly reduce the degree of parasitism, he adds.

Pinkeye can also be a problem to heifers during the summer when on pasture. Fly control is important with this infection. Affected heifers should be brought indoors for treatment and confined out of direct sunlight until the condition is cured, Heinrichs says.

Further items that are often overlooked with heifers while on pasture are salt and minerals. Trace mineral salt should always be available to heifers on pasture. Be sure to check that selenium is

present in this salt. The second item that should be available on a free-choice basis is a calcium-phosphorus supplement (dical). Research has shown, Heinrichs says, that heifer diets that are low in phosphorus, which can occur on pasture, can delay the onset of estrus in these animals.

Pasture, plus some good management, can provide a low-cost labor efficient system for handling heifers over six months of age. Maintaining proper growth rates throughout the entire summer requires additional feed and effort but will help result in well-grown, healthy heifers Heinrichs concludes.

Heifer management headlines twi-light meeting

GETTYSBURG — Practice in judging dairy cows, a tour of the barns and milking facilities and a review of recommended practices for the feeding and care of dairy calves and heifers were features of the twi-light meeting co-sponsored by the Adams County Holstein Association and the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service June 21, at the John Hess farm, Gettysburg.

Outlining sound health measures for young dairy stock, Dr. Jesso Stoner, veterinarian from New Oxford (recently re-located to the Duffield area in Franklin County) warned the dairymen that nipple feeding frequently leads to aspirating when worn nipples are used. This causes pneumonia. He urged the weaning to bucket feeding as soon as possible.

"If milk replacers are fed, be sure they are of high quality to supply adequate amounts of energy. This is especially important in winter," Stoner said.

Stoner emphasized the importance of housing calves separately from adult animals and following a regular worming schedule. Treatment for coccidiosis should be included on larger farms. Bull calves should be separated from heifers at six months of age to avoid unplanned breeding, Stoner added.

A slide-illustrated program on "Management of Dairy Herd Replacements" was presented by county agent Thomas E. Piper. He reminded the dairymen that the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service on June 4, instituted two new regulatory efforts affecting

dairymen. In the first of these dairymen should sign a producer certification for stating that calves to be slaughtered within the first three weeks of age have not received drugs. Such calves will be sold separately from uncertified calves. Calves without producer certificates will be subject to a new intensified residue-testing program.

Host farmer John Hess took the visitors on tour of the dairy barn he remodeled one year ago in which he milks 24 cows in a California-style flat parlor. "This unit provides the efficiency of a Double-Six parlor at one-fourth the cost" Hess said.

Hess' 140-cow herd is housed in a free stall barn, maintained in two production groups and fed a total mixed ration. Special feed ingredients include waste candy

and wet brewers' grains to supply lower cost sources of energy and protein.

The juggling contest was officiated by Billy Joe Heath, Westminster, Md. Jenny Hess and Carol Clowney tied as winners in the youth division; Marvin Brown was first, Carolyn Durboraw second in the adult division. Vo Ag teacher Ron Bower and 4-H leader Alan Zepp tabulated results.

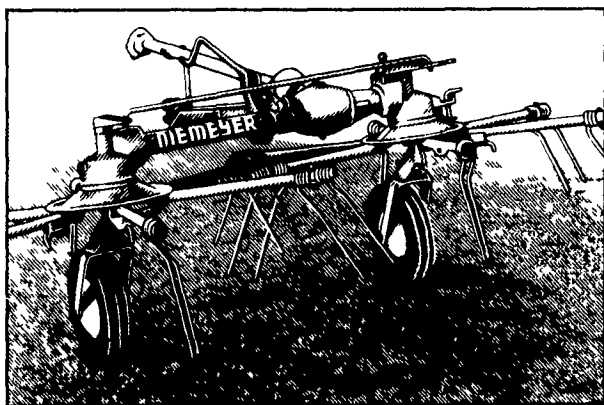
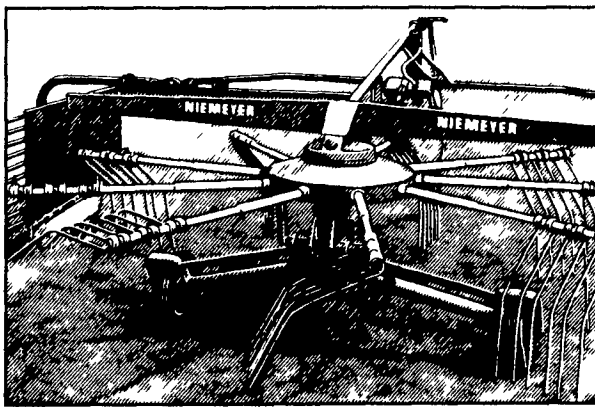
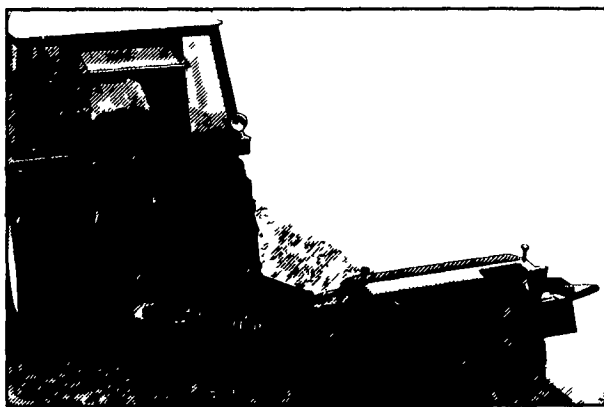
Carol Clowney, newly selected Adams County Dairy Princess, expressed appreciation for industry support of the Dairy Princess pageant and joined Michael Gitt representing the Pennfield Feed Corporation in serving refreshments to the group.



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