

Hot Holsteins prefer pond to beat the heat

Staff Correspondent
WESTMINSTER, Md. —
Summertime.

Even before the morning mist burns off the meadow, a sticky humidity has settled over farm country; and through hazy clouds, the sun promises hours of searing afternoon heat.

In dairy barns, fans whirl endlessly, stirring little more than the utility meter and a muggy air that neither cools nor dries cows lying listlessly in stalls, or piling together in the darkest, sloppiest corner, in search of a more tolerable environment.

Gates swing open, and one by one, the herd members plod out into the pasture, then likely head for the nearest shade, usually at some far corner of the meadow.

It's enough to make a cow go off feed. Or off production. Drop in butterfat test. And build up enough stress to bring on a "hot" bug of mastitis. Even cause spontaneous abortions.

Few dairy herds escape weather-wrought summertime stresses, the grim total of combining heat and humidity.

And at Roger Myers Del-Myr farm, just south of Westminster, Md, summertime is certainly not problem-free. Still, production on this high-averaged herd holds fairly well through the worst summer can bring.

Maybe it has something to do with the fact that this herd regularly goes swimming.

"Twenty years ago, we tore down a fence that had been around the pond," relates this lifelong dairyman. "The herd started to go in the pond then and still does today."

Dairy experts have long warned against allowing cows to loll around in farm ponds. They cite the possibility of increased mastitis due to the cattle's exposure to the "soup" of potentially dangerous bacteria known to

thrive in pond waters.

The Del-Myr 60-head registered Holstein herd, though, never bothered to read up on the experts recommendations. This group of water-loving cows simply learns, one generation after the other, that splashing into the pond on hot days, both coming from and going back to the barn, just simply feels good.

Mike, a herd favorite and current top producer of the group, leads the pack at swim-session time.

"She's usually the first one in - and the last one out," chuckles Jeff, second of the Myers' three sons, who recently returned home to join the family dairy business.

Mike pauses on the edge, studies the situation for just a moment, splashes into the sparkling water and swims over any deep spots as she heads for the middle of the pond. Head and back still out of the water, she half-closes her eyes and relaxes there in obvious enjoyment of the cooler temperatures.

Other herd members follow, until, on especially hot days, practically the entire herd has taken the plunge.

The herd production, presently over 18,000 pounds milk and 710 pounds fat, generally holds fairly stable through even the hottest weather. After several years of observation, Myers is convinced that the herd's dips in the pond are a definite contribution to holding production through the heat.

Mastitis shows no marked in-

crease during the swimming season. In fact, Myers says that any coliform mastitis, at least in his herd, has generally been a winter, rather than a summer, problem.

High producer Mike is a prime example. Classified EX-91, with top 365-day records at eight years of over 28,000 pounds milk and 900 pounds fat, Mike seems to thrive on the cooling-off visits to the pond.

With practiced eye for good cattle, Myers purchased the daughter of a Kingpin son at a local auction, gambling on her type and production promise, in spite of her having been bred five times as a 2-year-old and selling with no guarantee of having been settled.

Her swimming ability seems to be a bonus to Mike's other traits which have proven out for Myers.

Cows have been in the pasture at Del-Myr for as long as Roger Myers can remember. He was raised on this 155-acre farm which was purchased by his father, Guy, a former railroader. Hay, corn and wheat are cropped on both the home farm and an additional one hundred rented acres.

Son Jason recently began dairying on a farm just a few miles away, after establishing a herd while working with his father. Jeff, a former extension staffer, recent master's degree graduate of Michigan State and coach of their winning national collegiate dairy

judging team, has returned to the Westminster home farm to join the dairying business. Youngest son, Jerry, spent part of his study internship time as a classifier with the Brown Swiss association in Colombia, South America, and is presently seeking a college teaching position.

All continue their intense interest in dairying, rooted in this high-production, high-type herd of registered Holsteins, that head for that picturesque pond every chance they get.

And while never proven, there is a suspicion that as Mike splashes into the water, she turns around and moos to the rest of her herd-mates: "Last one in is a cull!"



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