

# DHIA: Working for dairymen, because of dairymen

BY WENDY WEHR

LANCASTER — How many times have you heard complaints about DHIA? You know, the supervisor was in such a hurry the other month that he mixed up the calving dates on two cows, and then it took three months to get it corrected. Or the computer at "the College" was down and the DHIA report never arrived until nine days after the tester was at the farm. Or the county directors voted to give the supervisors an across the board per cow raise when one of the supervisors has a really poor error rate.

You've heard those complaints about DHIA, and you may even have grumbled and groused about the program a few times yourself. But let's face it. DHI has the potential to be a powerful management tool in your dairy operation. And if you've got problems with your county DHI program, you've got to take some of the responsibility for those problems yourself.

Bob Kindig, president of the state board of directors of the Pa. Dairy Herd Improvement Association, and Jay Mylin, supervisor and county manager for the Lancaster County DHIA, both have strong feelings about the usefulness of DHIA to dairymen. But they also realize there are problems with DHIA, and that's why they're willing to go out of their way to make a contribution to the success of the program.

DHIA in Lancaster County is exceptional because it's by far the largest program in the state, employing 18 full-time supervisors and some additional samplers to service roughly 1,500 herds in the county. But what makes for successful management of this program could be useful in other county programs as well.

"We have an excellent staff in Lancaster County, and the board of directors is the best group of farmer/businessmen to work for," says Jay Mylin. He notes that the directors have set policies that establish a solid groundwork for the county's DHI program.

He also emphasizes the support that the board of directors give the supervisors. They've set up a pay scale that provides a "fair living," says Mylin, and the directors tackle all the issues, concerns, problems, or questions that the supervisors present. Part of doing

what's best for dairymen in the long run is providing quality service in the present.

Mylin's role in the smooth running of Lancaster County DHIA is fairly new. Although he's been a supervisor for 15 years, he began as county manager only last April. He handles hiring and training of new supervisors, supervisor problems, materials and equipment needs, and sales training. He also attends the director's meetings to represent the supervisors.

A current project on Lancaster County DHIA is writing a policy booklet. The booklet will pull together and update the policies established by the directors and outline the responsibilities of the farmers and supervisors that are a part of DHIA.

So the work of the county directors is one part of the successful program, but the individual working relationship between supervisor and dairyman has a lot of influence on dairyman satisfaction with the program too.

In hiring new supervisors, one of the first things Mylin looks for is the applicant's ability to relate well with farmers. Ability to work well by himself, responsibility, and initiative are other important characteristics for a supervisor, and dairy farm experience isn't necessarily a prerequisite.

Along with his county manager duties, Jay still has his own full-time testing circuit. He is responsible for 95 herds in the Manheim area, some 30 of which are owner-sampler. In addition, he has the extra responsibility of two samplers who work for him, although Jay does all the book work and visits all of his herds at least every other month.

Over the 15 years the number of dairy herds on DHIA in his area has grown. Now in the Manheim area 88 percent of the cows are on test.

Mylin describes his relationship at many family-run dairy farms where he tests as "almost being part of the family," visiting once a month and watching the changes that take place over the year. And caring about the dairy operations and doing a few extras does make for greater satisfaction for everyone.

Ear tagging calves and getting all the records that used to be all

scattered here and there into one calf book is one thing supervisors can do for farmers who are just starting with DHIA, says Mylin. Explaining the procedure for registering or transferring animals with the breed association is another help.

Many times, too, the DHIA supervisor is simply a good source of information about "what the other fellows are doing," about what particular feeding programs or breeding services are working for someone else.

And of course explaining DHIA records is another important part of the supervisor's service to the farmer. Mylin spends varying amounts of time going over records with farmers according to their needs, devoting little time to farmers who obviously understand them, and more time with new DHIA members and dairymen who want to start looking at their program in a different way.

"Everyone does use their records differently," says Mylin. And use of feed information is a good example. "Some farmers carefully weigh out the feed, while others make wild guesses." But Mylin does try to encourage dairymen to be more interested in their feeding information, because income over feed costs is the bottom line when it comes to efficiency.

Mylin cites record-keeping as one of the main advantages of DHIA. It forces the farmer to keep up his records each month, whether it's simply keeping an accurate record of fresh dates or carefully developing feed costs per cow.

"One of the things that convinces me that record-keeping pays," comments Mylin, "is that I've only ever had two herds drop out. This is the best test that the monthly DHIA fee is worth the money."

Bob Kindig, a Conestoga dairyman and the current president of the state DHIA board of directors would whole-heartedly agree on the usefulness of DHIA records.

"After you've been on the program, you wonder how people can manage a dairy operation without that information," says Kindig. He emphasizes the importance of the figures in the income-over-feed-costs column.

"You can look down over the pounds of milk produced and get one view of the cow, but if you've got to pump a lot of grain into her, is she making you any money?" And he emphasizes that there's lots of valuable information provided in the DHIA report, but if the records are used only to cull the right cows or analyze the two-year-olds and project what they should make as mature cows, participation in DHIA is worth it.

But "selling" DHIA is not Bob Kindig's only responsibility. As part of the state board of directors his job is to see that the DHIA policies are carried out and that, as he says, "Dairymen get the best service possible at the lowest possible cost."

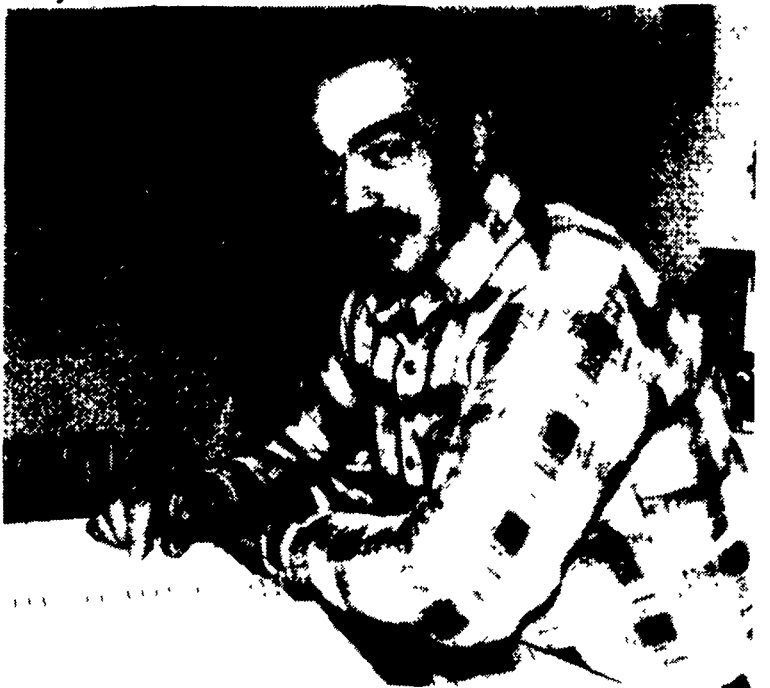
Of course Pa. DHIA does have a paid general manager, Philip Dukas, but he consults regularly with Kindig and the state directors to see that actions are following board policy.

Right now, the board is investigating the purchase of their own computer, which is one of the last physical ties that DHIA still has with Penn State University. Having their own computer would probably increase turn-around time on records, which is so important to the participating dairymen.

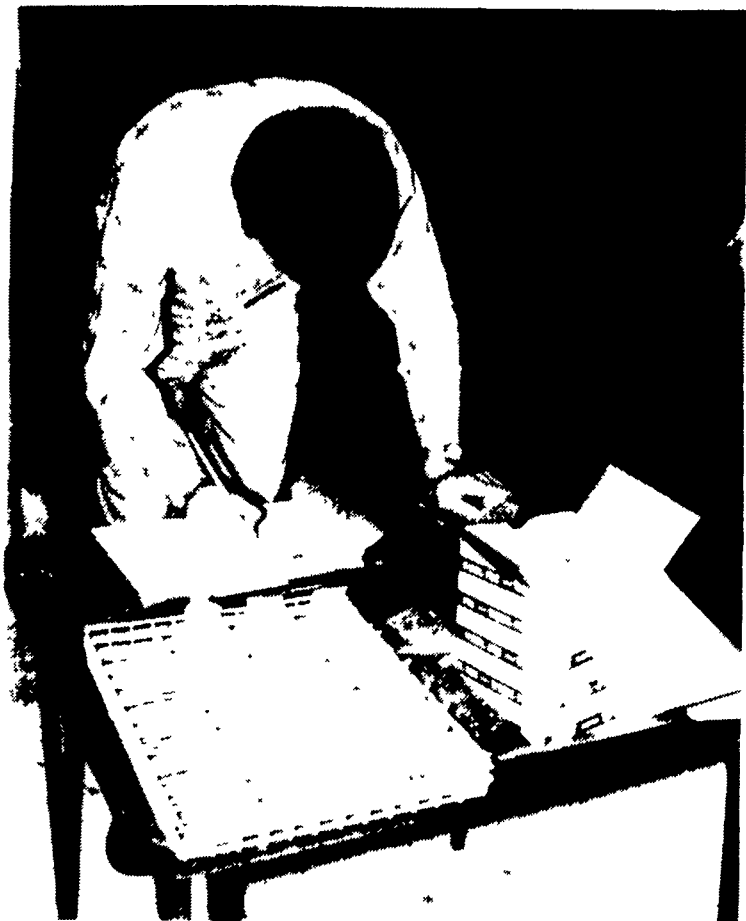
But selection of a new computer system must be made carefully. They want a system that will provide maximum useful information for dairymen, as well as



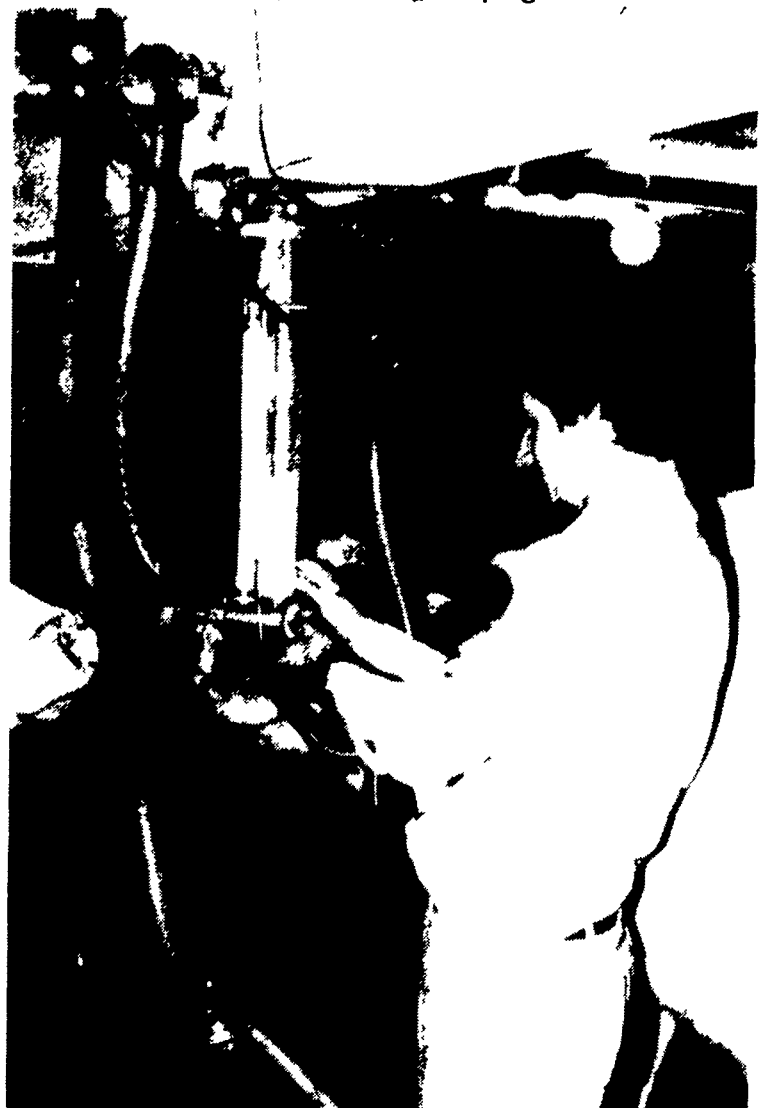
Jay Mylin, DHIA supervisor and county manager of the Lancaster DHIA, shares his thoughts about service to the dairymen.



Robert Kindig, president of the Pa. DHIA board of directors, discusses the management value of the DHI records and considers areas for improvement in the program.



Recording milk weights correctly is only one small part of being a successful DHIA supervisor. Jay Mylin encourages supervisors to do a few extras and take time to talk to dairymen about their records.



Reading the milk meter is practically second-nature to Jay Mylin after 15 years of experience as a DHIA supervisor.

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