

Md. offers innovative dairy reproduction workshops

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Despite computerized feed rations and sophisticated artificial insemination techniques, one problem in the nation's dairy cattle herds has gotten worse during the last 15 years.

Dairy experts label the problem as reproductive inefficiency, and farmers complain about "poor breeders" in their herds.

But whatever its name, the economic input is staggering. Some \$8 million is lost annually in Maryland alone. This amounts to \$66 per cow, or \$5,000 per dairy farm says Dr. Mark A. Varner, an Extension dairy management specialist and assistant professor of animal sciences at the

University of Maryland in College Park.

When dairy cows don't get pregnant on a regular schedule, a herd fails to achieve its most profitable level of milk output. This inefficiency in production accounts for two-thirds of the monetary loss attributed to reproductive problems, Dr. Varner commented. The balance comes from increased artificial breeding fees and veterinary payments.

Reproductive inefficiency has gotten worse during the last 15 years, he explained, because of the trend toward larger dairy herds and more cows per farm worker. As a result, most cows today don't

get as much individual attention as their dams did.

But hope is around the bend. New techniques have been developed for dealing with the problem. And the federal Food and Drug Administration recently has approved some new drugs for use in lactating cows with reproductive problems.

Information on these new drugs and techniques will be included in a series of educational workshops being conducted across the state this winter by the University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service.

The workshops will kick off Phase III — or the third year — of

Profitable and Efficient Production (PEP), an ongoing statewide Extension educational program for dairy farmers.

Phase I of the program, which began in 1983, emphasized dairy cow nutrition. And it introduced UMDAIR, the University of Maryland computerized least-cost ration formulation program. UMDAIR is estimated to have saved Maryland dairy farmers \$1.2 million in feed costs during fiscal year 1984, according to Dr. E. Kim Cassel, Extension dairy nutrition specialist at the College Park campus.

Phase II of the Maryland PEP program got under way last year. It emphasized milk quality improvement through reduction of mastitis infections in dairy herds. There has not been sufficient time to measure the economic impact of this campaign.

But a significant number of farmers who attended the 1984 winter workshops indicated that they would make changes in their milking practices, reports Dr. Robert R. Peters, Extension milking management specialist at the University of Maryland.

Planning for this year's Phase III educational campaign was begun two years ago by Dr. Varner and Dr. Joe E. Manspeaker, an Extension dairy cattle veterinarian at the College Park campus. Dr. Manspeaker is an associate professor in the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine.

Their campaign is an improved version of similar programs offered a few years ago by Cooperative Extension Service specialists in Pennsylvania and Indiana. For one thing, it will be a more in-depth effort than anything previously offered to farmers along this line.

But the biggest plus for the Maryland program will be a first-of-its-kind manual titled Dairy Integrated Reproductive Management. Published in

December 1984, the looseleaf manual contains a series of 26 fact sheets authored by dairy science specialists at land-grant universities throughout the Northeast. It was edited by Dr. Ellen R. Jordan, and Extension dairy specialist at West Virginia University. The fact sheets are intended for annual updating.

Already the manual has been sold in 44 states and seven foreign countries, Dr. Varner reported. Portions are being reprinted as feature articles in Hoard's Dairyman, the nation's largest and most well-known dairy periodical.

The manual will be used as a text for this winter's PEP educational workshops in Maryland, and all participants will receive a copy for their personal use.

Varner emphasized that the goal for this year's educational workshops is not how to breed cows artificially. Rather, it is to help farmers put together a total reproductive management program which integrates herd health, nutrition and genetics.

Among the new developments to be introduced at the Maryland Extension workshops is a procedure which permits hormone levels in milk to be measured at the farm. This enables producers to determine stage of the estrus cycle for individual cows. Armed with such knowledge, farmers can make more effective use of prostaglandins and other permissible drugs.

The enzyme assay process for measuring hormone levels in milk has been dubbed with the acronym, ELISA. Maryland is one of the states where its practical use is being pioneered.

During the past two years, the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station has allocated \$20,000 for developing the process. Money came from the Avrum Gudelsky Research Fund which supports veterinary and agricultural research at the University of Maryland.

New Clearfield Extension Agent promotes ag, tourism

CLEARFIELD — Clearfield County has found a unique way to relieve some of the area's unemployment by hiring Pennsylvania's first Extension agent for county agriculture and tourism development.

"It's a position created to help develop jobs and generate enthusiasm in Clearfield," says newly appointed extension agent Ronald C. Anderson. "(The position will also help) get people in the local tourist businesses and service industries to offer a better service."

Anderson will study available markets and possible farming projects. Although large business is being considered, he says his programs will be aimed at the small-farm operator.

"My goal is to find ways to develop income from within the county," he says. "There are not enough ways now."

Clearfield's groundbreaking approach to its unemployment problem was devised by Clearfield County Extension Agent Harold R. Bock and a citizen's group called the Agriculture Development Council. The council realized the county "needed an individual to handle agricultural development," Bock says.

Funding for the position was the biggest hurdle. Bock says Penn State's Cooperative Extension Service agreed to put up half the money for the position and project, and suggested that the Clearfield council try the state's Ben Franklin Partnership Grant office

for the other half.

Bock and the council discovered that the second half of the funding could come through the Entrepreneurial Development section of the Ben Franklin Partnership Grant program if the money was used only for agricultural development. The council agreed to fund tourism efforts through other means.

Although Ben Franklin grants didn't fund the full amount requested, Bock says, \$5,160 was allotted for Clearfield last spring.

"Ben Franklin officials said they would like to see more funding on the local level," Bock says, "and the county commissioners' office has agreed to help." The effort will also be supported by donations from local businesses.

After funding was set, Bock and Anderson mapped out plans for their objective: more agriculture jobs and business for Clearfield. By the end of January, the agents will have "a package of five or six major projects we want to develop," Anderson says.

"Projects will be created to stir up interest," Bock adds. "Our objective is to put bucks in the pockets of the people here."

For example, Bock and Anderson see the possibility of three small-animal projects for Clearfield. Since acres of county land were abused by strip mining, Anderson sees the possibility of developing reusable land for sheep raising. Chickens can be raised on small private farms for white-skinned meat—a mainstay of fast-

food chains. Rabbits could be raised for meat or pelts on smaller farm properties.

The success of any project considered, however, depends on "the potential markets for the products or service we decide on," Anderson says.

When Anderson and Bock settle on a desirable market, their next step is to generate program support through the county. Anderson hopes to light a fire under agricultural group members, vocational agriculture teachers and 4-H representatives.

Tourism is another matter. Instead of establishing of new tourist attractions, both extension agents want to promote what is already in Clearfield.

"Besides a major fair, we have an antique car show, flea market and an assortment of craft shows," Anderson says.

No projects have been completed yet, but Clearfield natives have backed Bock and Anderson's efforts so far.

"People here have been very receptive," Bock says. "They want to do anything to generate employment."

Annual Equipment Operators' workshop scheduled

LEESPORT — The 30th Annual Equipment Operator's Workshop has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 5, in the auditorium of the Berks County Agricultural Center in Bern Township. The U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service and the Berks County Conservation District jointly sponsor this event.

Presenters this year include: American Telephone and Telegraph, UGI, Texas Eastern, Pennsylvania Land Improvement Contractors (P.L.I.C.A.), Morrissey Insurance, Pennsylvania State Police, Penn-

sylvania Fish Commission, and Soil Conservation Service. The lunch will be sponsored this year by P.L.I.C.A. and Morrissey Insurance of Ephrata, Pa.

Topics included in the program will be: safety, computers, insurance, underground cables, stream and streambank work, conservation practice installations and other timely concerns.

A letter of invitation has been mailed to all contractors on the mailing list. Any contractor is welcome to attend and can make a reservation by calling the Conservation District at 372-4655.

Lanc. Farm & Home tickets available

LANCASTER — Tickets are still available for the annual dinner meeting of the Lancaster County Farm and Home Foundation. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 31 at 6:30 p.m. at the Farm and Home Center.

In addition to a brief business meeting, there will be election of directors for the Foundation.

Entertainment will be provided

by the Greiner family of Berks County, a widely known group who present instrumental and vocal gospel and inspirational music.

Tickets may be purchased for \$8 from any director, or by calling Business Manager Chet Neun, phone 392-4911. Annual family memberships may be renewed at this time for \$2.

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