

The Dairy Business

By
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Guesstimates:

Close But Not Close Enough

Most of us grow up developing a certain amount of what we like to call "good judgement." The business of farming requires a fair amount of horse sense, snap decisions, and rule-of-thumb estimates. If developed highly enough, this kind of skill can carry you a long way in the world. But in today's world of high tech, making snap judgements or playing guessing games might be very costly. Some of the most expensive guesses you make need not be

guesses at all. There are ways of taking the guesswork out of many decisions. All it takes is a resolve to gather the facts and put them to the test. You don't guess whether a heifer is in heat, if you bother to observe and write down a few dates. Guessing at whether she is pregnant after breeding can be a losing game. Both heat periods and pregnancy can be positively diagnosed, so why guess? Guesstimating the quality of your hay and other forage is a

foolish waste, since they can be tested for protein, TDN, minerals, and ADF with a high degree of certainty. No feed program can be fine-tuned without forage testing. And efficient milk production can't be had without precision feeding. Along the same line, guessing at the nutrient content of a grain ration is just as foolish, when so much is known or can be measured in feeding cows. Just routinely feeding a 16 percent grain ration can be costly in lower production as well as higher cost, if a higher or lower protein content is required. A poorly balanced ration is an expensive luxury that few can afford. There are so many measuring sticks available to every farmer. DHIA is getting more precise every day. Forages and all feed-stuffs can be precisely tested. Soil testing becomes more economical as the cost of fertilizer and lime goes up. Many devastating diseases of cattle can be correctly diagnosed, or better yet, tested for before they hit the herd. Preventive diagnostics is a must, especially in a purebred herd. Everything that can be measured, weighed, or tested, can add to the wealth if knowledge that you need to make sound decisions. We no longer like to guess at crop yields when they can be measured. We don't accept a guess at the number of bushels of beans or

wheat delivered to the mill. We like to know precisely how many pounds of milk the dairy pays us for. And who guesses at the fat test? Even protein and SNF can be measured, and will enter into the check we receive from the dairy. Paying attention to the somatic cell count can pay big dividends in early diagnosis of mastitis. And every penny that goes in or out of the bank can be accurately checked. Nobody but nobody would guess that he has more money than the bank statement shows, would he? Precise measurement is more critical here than anywhere! Don't get me wrong. Good judgement is still a very valuable asset. But the people who show the

best use of good judgement in any decision making process are the ones who are best informed at all levels of their business. They have learned to make use of every test, every measure, and every diagnostic tool available. And there are so many measuring sticks and tools available today that we can't afford not to use them. Intuition and folk remedies might be cheap substitutes for accurate measurement, but they could be the most costly when a routine decision demands accurate measures. The guessing game could be your most expensive gamble. Why gamble when you can control the stakes with sound information?

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cents from the previous month, while the butterfat differential increased one-half cent. The September 1986 Class I price and the July 1986 Class II price are based on the July 1986 Minnesota-Wisconsin manufacturing milk price of \$11.06 per hundredweight at a 3.5 percent butterfat content. The USDA reported that the wholesale price of Grade A butter at Chicago for July was \$1.4366 per pound and the nonfat dry milk price was \$.8084 per pound, f.o.b. plants in the Chicago area.

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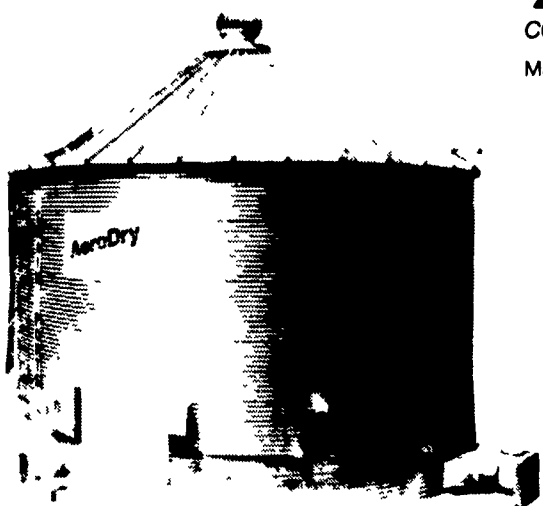
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