

Dairy Nutritionist Talks About Feeding Practices

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pound herd averages that really could also come up to 20,000 pound herd average. Probably the 20,000 pound herd average person is going to come up as they always do to 22,000 and 24,000 pound herd average. There are a lot of steps that can be taken to continue to help the fellow at 16,000, 18,000 pound rank. Those things can be implemented fairly quickly. You can see some pretty quick rises, with the available information we have now, pretty quick increases in production from 16,000 to 18,000, 19,000 by doing some feeding management things. Assuming that there isn't some other weak link on the farm. Assuming that there isn't some reproductive mismanagement or mastitis, stray voltage or water problems, you can make some changes pretty quickly to bring it from 16,000 to 18,000, 19,000. Then when you go from 19,000 to 20,000, it becomes more difficult. From 20,000 to 22,000, it becomes ever more difficult. There certainly is potential of cows that were not meeting. Part of that is because of nutrition. There are some things the farmers do nutritionally and nutrition management wise that limit that to the two things we talked about—not delivering enough, not feeding in the right sequence. Some of the other things are noted here also. Forage quality is a limiting factor on a lot of farms. The farmer has to be aware that you can't produce high amounts of milk starting from a low quality forage base. There is only so much that you can add in terms of energy density. From grains even from fat, there is only so much you can add before you begin to mess up the rumen fermentation. High levels can do that, high amounts of corn and grain will cause a specific condition. So there is a limit to the amount that you can improve something. Start from a high forage quality base so that it translates into more production. That's a key area to emphasize. It's something that we do at Pennfield. We emphasize the importance of high-quality forages. You can see that in the herds we deal with. You can track the forage energy level. And track milk production almost.

Q. The way we feed cows now and the way we fed them 25 years ago, what changes have we seen? Where are we? We are still feeding them hay, silage and grain.

A. Yes. I would hope that we've made progress in terms of better and better silage. You don't see a whole lot of changes in silage. There have been a trend toward higher grain content in silage, lower fiber, more energy in silage. I'm quite hopeful across the board hay qualities have improved. We're talking about higher energy hays. I can think about when I was growing up on the farm. We were fortunate in that we would make straight alfalfa stands and had an artificial dryer system and put up high quality hay at that point. I remember many of the extension people talking about, Dick Adams term was patriotic hay, made after the fourth of July. They let it get too mature. Hopefully we continue to tell that message. That we've improved the forages. The other obvious thing is that there is a lot more grain being fed. And in more recent years more increase in fat feeding. There has also been an emphasis on protein balance. The limit is coming on how much grain can be fed. The time when you could simply feed another couple of pounds of corn, high moisture corn, dry corn, whatever and expect production to increase is gone.

Q. Let's talk a little bit about somatotropin. Where do you see this coming to and from?

A. There sure is a lot of interest in that for something that still is apparently a couple years down the road. I guess the reason is everybody saw the numbers of 40 percent increase and thought we don't need milk at this time. I am maybe biased because I come from a research technical orientation. I think if were to stop progress, the future would not look bright. Progress is necessary. Sometimes it has its pitfalls. I would consider that progress.

I had this discussion with the farmer across the table yesterday. He was pretty much against it. "The government's got to find a way to stop this from coming to market," he said. I don't really agree with that. I think that the free market ought to operate. If it allows you to produce milk more effectively, efficiently, at better cost, the free market ought to operate. That's a personal bias. That's not speaking for Pennfield. I'm, first of all, skeptical whether you're going to see that 40 percent increase in milk production. Secondly, the good farmers will do

well with it. The poor farmers will probably mess up the herd and either get off it or go out of business. I compare it to three-time-a-day milking. You can get 15 percent increase in production with three-time-a-day milkings. Some farmers tried it. Cows had more mastitis problems. They weren't able to manage that additional stress on the animal and went away from it. They didn't necessarily go out of business but still competed otherwise. I don't

think that everyone who doesn't use growth hormone is necessarily going to have to go out of business. You'll have to continue to be an efficient producer. Some people I think will use it and improve their situation. Some people won't. I'm hopeful what happens is that we market more milk. First of all that there are more sales of milk if we have more milk produced. And in fact we should try to continue to emphasize that area. And if we

don't, if we're not able to increase sales of milk, I would hope that there'd be at some point in the future a consensus that, "Well, I'm going to produce about the same amount of milk and milk fewer cows." That's always a hard thing to get farmers to agree on. That's the way I would like to see it done. Most farmers would rather milk 40 percent fewer cows and have each cow give 40 percent more milk. But you can't get everybody to agree on that.

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