

# Dairy Herd Health Programs Yield Return Of \$20 To \$1

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — A regular monthly herd health program supervised by a veterinarian will increase the dairy producer's annual income from a 100-cow herd by \$35,000 at a cost of only \$1,700, yielding a return of more than \$20 for every \$1 invested in veterinary services, according to studies conducted by Jenks Swann Britt, DVM.

"It's pretty near impossible to find an investment that yields a return of 20 to 1. As a practical matter, there is no better investment today's hard-pressed dairyman can make," Britt said in reporting his herd health research to the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Britt's studies confirm results reported in studies of the influence of veterinary services on the profitability of dairy operations conducted by the Idaho Veterinary Medical Association and the

Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association.

Britt used a model cow herd to calculate the amount of increased income that is generated by a program consisting of mastitis control, reproductive health management, improved calf raising, increased feed efficiency and parasite control. Total increased income was \$36,540, a figure that came remarkably close to the average increased income of \$34,716 recorded in a parallel study of the actual records of 18 dairy herds.

Here is how Britt's herd health management program increases the dairy producer's income, using a milk price of \$12 per hundredweight, slightly less than current prices, and presuming each cow has a 60-day dry period each year:

**Mastitis Control:**

- Reduce somatic cell count in

a year from 700,000 to as low as 350,000, resulting in an increase of 5 pounds daily in milk production;

- 5 pounds x 305 days x \$.12/lb. x 100 cows = \$18,300.

• According to the Idaho study, mastitis control alone will produce a return to the dairy producer of \$11 for every \$1 invested in veterinary services.

**Reproductive Health:**

- Reduce calving interval by 14 days, saving \$1.50 per day; 14 days x \$1.50 x 100 cows = \$2,100;

- Reduce bull services per conception by .25;

.25 x 100 x \$6.00 semen straw = \$150;

Total Reproductive Health Savings = \$2,250.

**Calf Raising:**

- Reduce mortality rate from 20 percent to 10 percent;

• Save 5 bull calves @ \$70 (\$350) and 5 heifer calves @ \$200 (\$1,000) = \$1,350.

**Nutrition:**

- Use minicomputer analysis to improve feed efficiency;

- Increase milk production by 3 lbs. per cow or produce the same amount of milk on less feed;

- 3 lbs. of milk/day x 305 days x \$.12/lb. x 100 cows = \$10,900.

**Parasite Control:**

- Control internal parasites by deworming and external parasites by various methods; adjusted for seasons and conditions;

- Increase milk production by 1 lb./cow/day x 305 days x 100 cows = \$3,660

Total Increased Income \$36,540.

These numbers are based on a model cow herd assuming a rolling herd average milk production of 11,000 pounds a year, a somatic cell count of 700,000, projected calving interval of 13.5 months, average 2.25 services per conception, 20 percent calf mortality, first-calf heifers at 32 months (can cut to 24-26 months), no professionally balanced nutrition program, and no regular parasite control program.

To test the numbers, Britt studied actual records of 18 herds of similar size. Nine herds were on a regular herd health program, and nine used veterinary services on an emergency call only basis.

The emergency call only herds had average production of 11,770 pounds, and spent an average of \$17.06 per cow for veterinary services. The regular herd health program group achieved average production of 14,670 pounds with veterinary expenses averaging \$33.74 per cow.

The herds in the regular

program paid an additional \$16.66 for veterinary services and produced 2,893 pounds more per cow than the emergency call only herds. For a 100 cow herd, increased income was thru \$34,716, very close to the total shown in the model study.

"We conducted these studies to prove to ourselves that our program is working. We are not surprised to find that our results are very similar to those reported in Idaho, Minnesota, and elsewhere. These results demonstrate that we are actually in the management business. When veterinary services are used strategically as part of a total management program, dairy producers can significantly increase income," said Britt, who also operates a dairy business.

The Minnesota study points out that scientific advances and increased knowledge of the factors that influence the spread of infectious diseases in dairy cows now make it possible to control diseases that were once commonplace.

"The veterinarian has the unique role of coordinating the biological requirements of the animals with the production requirements of the operators," the Minnesota study explains.

According to the Minnesota report, veterinarians today often spend eight years studying livestock production, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases, nutritional consultation, environmental effects on production (including ventilation and housing), and effective management techniques.

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