By Improving Herd Records, Dairymen Will Net Higher Profits

NEWARK, Del. – The current tight economic situation has prompted many dairy farmers to evaluate each farm expenditure in relation to profits. "Herd managers must invest their milk income dollars where they will get the greatest return the fastest," says University of Delaware extension dairy specialist Dr. George Haenlein.

To earn an adequate income under today's conditions, he says dairy farmers must identify and solve production problems of feeding, breeding, reproduction, genetics, health, labor, pesticides, facilities and money management. That's a big challenge.

Haenlein advises producers to make maximum use of records of the Dairy Herd Improvement Association system when making management decisions. The DHIA Record Processing Centers at Pennsylvania State University, Cornell University, North Carolina State University and Provo, Utah, give feeding recommendations based on pounds of milk and milk butterfat percentage, a growth factor for young cows, size of cow, quality and quantity of hay being fed and the feeding value of the grain mix.

"These can provide the catalyst that makes all the other inputs work together more successfully," he says. "The average expenditure for DHIA records is about 1.5 percent of the total cost of producing milk on the farm. To not have DHIA records is being penny-wise but pound-foolish." Instead, he advises dairy farmers "to use these records for all they are worth" to make their investment pay high dividends.

Based on a recent Wisconsin survey, Haenlein says any of the following items can justify the cost of DHIA records:

- Feed cost savings of three pounds per cow per day at least during the last 90 days of lactation.
- Improved calving intervals of 5.5 days per cow per year.
- Better age of first calving by 1.7 months.
- Reduced somatic cell count, which is a measure of milk quality and subclinical mastitis, to earn premium payments.
- Increased milk production of one-half pound per cow per day.

"Dairy records are worth most to those dairy farmers who rely most heavily on them, the specialist says. Producers who know the production record of each cow are in a position to make changes that increase profitability. Peak performance, stage of lactation comparisons, milking persistency and comparisons between cows all affect profitability.

Feed costs usually account for about 50 percent of all milk production expenses. "Since feed is such a large portion of the total cost of running a dairy operation, it is only logical that feeding is an area where major savings can be made," Haenlein says. "Properly used, DHIA can help a dairy farmer control feed costs while getting more milk per cow."

On many dairy farms another opportunity to improve profits lies in better herd reproduction efficiency, Haenlein says, citing a recent mid-western study which showed losses due to reproductive failure could run as high as $10,000 per herd per year.

Improved reproductive performance pays off in several ways, the specialist says. Reduced calving intervals help eliminate long, dry periods. Cows that are bred back sooner are less likely to face a long stretch of low daily production at the end of the lactation. Veterinary bills and breeding costs can be trimmed sharply. And more calves per herd per year are born.

"Mastitis continues to be the most costly dairy disease," Haenlein says, "with estimated losses of $150 to $200 per cow per year being average. Sound mastitis and milking management are the keys to greater profits for many dairy farmers."

The major culprit in the losses due to mastitis is subclinical or "hidden" mastitis. Haenlein says 70 percent of these losses are the result of lost milk production due to udder and secretory tissue damage.

"Mastitis losses can be minimized by using DHIA somatic cell count information on a regular monthly basis for every cow," the specialist says.

Dairy farmers can also use DHIA information to make profitable breeding, culling and calf raising decisions. Haenlein, who is on the animal science faculty of the University of Delaware's College of Agricultural Sciences, says he is teaching his students how to use DHIA records in dairy herd analyses for better profitability. He believes this will make those who go into dairy-related business careers better managers.

Maine Family Named AJCC Master Breeder

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Robert S. Pike and Family, owners of Highland Farms Inc., Cornish, Maine, have been named winners of the 1987 Master Breeder Award by The American Jersey Cattle Club Board of Directors. The award will be presented June 25 at the Civic Center, Eau Claire, Wis., during the AJCC's 119th Annual Meeting.

The Master Breeder Award is bestowed annually to a living AJCC member who has "bred outstanding animals for many years and thereby made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed in the United States." "Many years" in the case of the Pike Family translates to 101, as David C. Pike founded the operation on top of Towle's Hill outside of Cornish in 1886.

Five Generations of the Pike Family have owned and operated Highland Farms, whose management now includes Robert S.'s son, Robert L., and daughter and son-in-law, Allaire and John Palmer. The sixth generation is now represented by five great-grandchildren of Robert S.

Highland Farms has twentieth-generation descendants of one of their original cows, Perty W. 41721, purchased 101 years ago. The development of strong cow families through the years coupled with the use of the highest Predicted Difference bulls available through AI have led to their tremendous success.

Highland Farms currently has four bulls in active AI service, including Highland Magic Duncan. "Duncan" is proving to be a Jersey phenomenon, holding first place in every Jersey yield trait category on the USDA Sire Summary and also having the highest PD for Type of all active AI Jersey bulls.

Highland Farms has been on AJCC official performance testing since enrolling on Register of Merit in 1925. They switched to Herd Improvement Registry in 1931, when the herd averaged 8,353 milk and 486 butterfat on 22 cows. The 1986 DHIR lactation average was 14,912 milk and 702 butterfat on 129 completed records.