

Helps Farmers Get An Edge

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to these questions," Muller admitted. "I do predict it will cause management changes."

In an effort to answer some of the questions, Muller started with a description of BST.

A naturally occurring hormone, BST is found in all dairy cows. It is not used to stimulate growth, so it should not be called "bovine growth hormone." It does, however, divert energy from feed to milk production. "Most of the high-producing cows have more BST in their system (than lower producers)," said Muller.

BST can't be fed because it will be digested as a protein. It doesn't get into a cow's milk, so there's little chance that a person would drink it, but even if they should, their body would treat it like a protein.

A cow's milk production goes up when BST is introduced. According to recent studies, when administered to a cow between 80 and 90 days after calving, there is a 10 to 12 pound increase in milk and a six to eight week maximum feed intake delay. The BST also will increase weight loss because it causes the cow to remain longer in a negative energy balance.

Administering BST at 30 to 40 days post calving is not a good idea, according to Muller. When cows receive BST that early in their lactation, they experience delayed conception, longer delayed intake, less of an increase in milk produced, and more body weight loss.

"If you use BST, you must restore the cow's body reserves during late lactation," Muller stressed. How much condition is restored influences how she will do during her next lactation.

A cow that has received BST should be treated similarly to any other high producer. Among the changes made to her diet would be more fat, especially inert fat, more

grain, and perhaps a longer time in the high group.

Muller believes BST will benefit both small and large dairy farms. Small farms can benefit because it requires no excessive capital outlays to increase production. Family farms could benefit because fewer cows would be needed to produce the same amount of milk. With fewer cows, the farmer could manage without additional labor.

"It may help the survival of the small farm if it is well managed and if the farmer adopts good management practices," concluded Muller.

Johne's Disease

At one time farmers didn't worry too much about Johne's. Not any more. Estimates are that five to 20 percent of U.S. cattle have Johne's.

"One of the most common signs is excessive weight loss and diarrhea," said Dr. Lawrence Hutchinson. Another sign is a predisposition to other illnesses.

Herds that have Johne's have a higher incidence of close contact between heifers and cows, according to a survey Hutchinson cited. The study, conducted a few years ago on 63 Johne's positive herds, also reported a higher incidence of shared feed sweepings and lower incidences of quick separation of calves from dams, culling of suspicious animals, and raising most replacement heifers.

Penn State currently is conducting a field study using a test more sensitive than that presently used by the state. The test picks up low shedders and is giving farmers the option of choosing which cows to cull first. Hutchinson expects the study to be completed by fall.

There will be a meeting at the Lancaster Farm & Home Center on March 28 to update dairy farmers more fully on Johne's Disease. Contact the extension office for more details.

Biosecurity

One way to combat diseases such as Johne's is to keep it off the farm.

In his second presentation, Hutchinson described a biosecurity program being developed for dairy farmers. The program, Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Biosecurity, involves seven steps:

1. Control new arrivals—When purchasing cows, stay away from lactating cows that have to be milked immediately, Hutchinson advised. "Buy bred heifers, dry cows, or springing heifers, but not

too springing," he said. These animals can be separated from the herd.

New animals should be isolated for 21 days by which time any disease she might have could be discovered. During isolation she should be tested for all diseases the farmer is controlling on his farm such as Johne's, strep ag mastitis, leukosis, or BVD. In addition she could be vaccinated at this time.

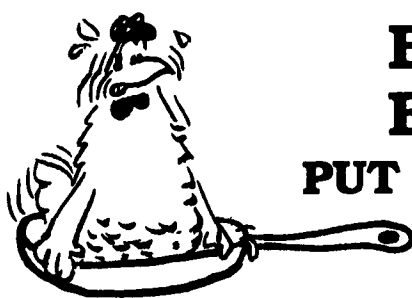
Should it be necessary to purchase a lactating cow, Hutchinson advises putting her in a stall at the end of the barn or in a separate pen.

She should be the last cow milked to keep her from infecting other members of the herd.

2. Control farm traffic—Prevent wild birds access to the barn. Starlings, crows, and pigeons can carry disease from farm to farm by stepping in manure then feed bunks or by carrying the viruses internally.

Rodent, dogs, and cats carry disease as well. Roaming animals should be kept away from cows as much as possible.

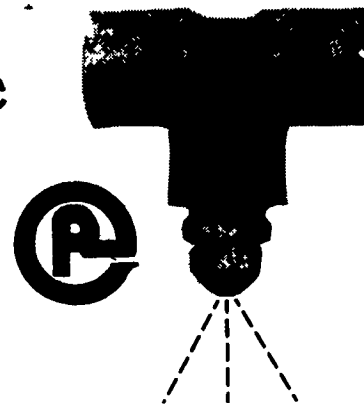
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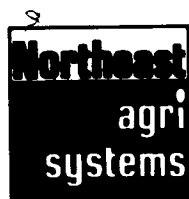
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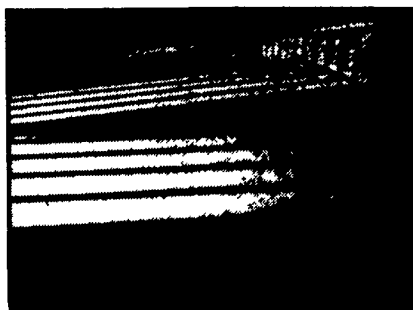
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