

BST Research

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They have experienced no health related problems and no breeding problems related to the use of BST. In fact, the number of cull cows leaving the herd decreased by 33 head from 1987 to 1988. And this year looks even better.

In addition, the cows that were treated with BST in the last lactation started out better this year, too. But the increase is not necessarily repeatable, either by lactation or by genetics. No one seems to know why sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work on the same cows or in the same herd. Yet, in most cases, you do get a 10- to 12-pound per cow per day increase in production for the first six weeks. Then the condition of the cow and the amount of energy you get into her will determine if you hold the extra milk production.

But for all practical purposes, you need more records, particularly milk weight records, to know exactly what production you are getting from the BST. In the Nobis herd, they have a DHIA tester come twice per month to give them more current milk weight data. But they still believe BST is one thing that came along that has done what people said it would do.

"We were expecting problems," Larry said. "We thought it would be harder to keep condition on the cow, thought we might have mastitis problems, or breeding problems. We just haven't..."

At Nobis they think BST should be used as another management tool. If you have up to an 18,000-pound herd, they think you should probably initiate other better management practices first. After you feed to get the maximum inherent genetic production from your cows, you could then consider the use of BST to go higher in production.

The brothers think a cost of 50 cents per cow per day would make the product very profitable in their herd. And since four companies will likely get the opportunity to compete for the farmers' business, the competition will drive the cost of the product down from the beginning of sales.

Ken did express some real concerns about cooperatives and retail stores who have sided with vocal animal rights groups and refused to handle milk produced under BST treatment.

"We are especially disappointed at the reaction of some farm groups," he said. "I think they are

setting a dangerous precedent and they give credibility to people who don't care about the farmer. We need to refute the emotional input from these groups whenever possible and we need to do it at the pharmaceutical company level, the university level and the producer level. Frankly, I don't think the consumer is that stupid. You just don't see anything in a cow treated with BST that you don't see in a fresh cow," Ken said.

Two other farmers were visited by the editors and names, addresses and photographs were recorded. But later in the trip, officials at Monsanto ask the farm media not to identify these two farms for security reasons. But it can be said that the results of the BST trials in these two herds were identical to the experience of the Nobis brothers.

One father and son team at Elsie, MI, has cows on the top DHIA list for the first time in the history of the farm. In this herd the cows are very tame and in excellent body condition. These dairy-

"BST is a natural protein that is produced in the pituitary gland of all cattle."—Robert Collier

men wait until after the peak production of the lactation is past and then BST is injected. The cows then usually produce the same level as their peak production accomplished after calving. BST holds the high production on through the lactation. No health problems were seen.

At the third farm located at Fowler, the dairymen raised the production average on this commercial herd by 2,000 pounds of milk. They also had no breeding problems and no side health problems from the use of BST. No question about it, the commercial dairy herds visited by the Monsanto farm editors' tour saw evidence that BST works. They also found that the average expected increase in milk production was from 10 to 12 pounds per cow per day.

Bill Thomas, farm trial inspector, reported at the dinner meeting with the trial farm families on Tuesday evening, that 93 to 95 percent of the cows given BST will respond with increased milk production. He said the response is immediate and the drop-off in production after the last treatment is given, is also noticeable.

In addition, farmers who want to use BST effectively will need to



Visiting on the Nobis Dairy Farm, Fowler, MI, are (l to r): Wayne Edwards, district manager, Ken Nobis, Dr. Robert Patton, product development and Larry Nobis. The Nobis herd is on Monsanto's field trials for BST.

keep better records. Beside the usual calving/breeding records, the daily milk weights may also be essential so that production peaks and drops are noticed immediately. Thomas reported that in the on-farm trials, the response was better

than at the university trials.

"Farmers just take care of the individual cow at home better than the hired help at the universities do," Thomas said.

Farmers wanted to know what Monsanto officials thought the selling price would be when the product is approved by the FDA. One official responded that his guess was that because four com-

"We were expecting problems. We thought it would be harder to keep condition on the cow, thought we might have mastitis or breeding problems. We just haven't..."—Ken and Larry Nobis

panies will have the BST product right from the beginning of sales, the competition may drive the price down to about 25 to 30 cents per day per cow. But he said, no one really knows what the price will be or how it will be distributed. But the official speculated that the company may have some regions with large herds where sales will be direct to dairymen. In other areas, for example, Pennsylvania and Maryland, where the herds are smaller, a dealer network

may be used. On the other hand, the distribution of BST may need to go through veterinarians. This type of distribution would necessitate higher margins; thus, a greater cost to the dairymen. Veterinarian distribution may be necessary not for medical reasons but to make sure the used needles and syringes are properly disposed.

At the dinner meeting Pete Ondrus, Carson City, reported that he had his herd on the trials but dropped out, not because it didn't work, but because he became afraid that he might lose his milk market. Ondrus said he read the negative reports in the papers about milk companies that had shut farmers down when they found out they were producing milk with BST treatment.

He added that we don't know, in the high producing cows that are

already under stress, what will be the outcome if we stress them more with BST treatment. "What will it do to the cows?" he asked.

In addition, Ondrus said he felt you would need a computer to help you find the peak of lactation so you could use the product effectively.

Ondrus said that even though he was not on the trial anymore, the disciplines he learned in better management added as much to his management practices as BST.

"BST is one of the best things to come along since the milking machine," Ondrus said.

"We don't know what the product price will be, but competition may drive it down to 25 to 30 cents per cow per day."—Robert Patton

Dr. Gary Hartnell, group leader of dairy clinical research, said that nutritionally, you need to handle a BST treated cow just like you handle a fresh cow. "Cows on BST do increase dry matter intake, but it lags behind the increase in milk production by about 4 to 6 weeks," Hartnell said. "What we see with BST is like starting the lactation over again in the middle. Therefore, the kind of feeding program you have followed in early lactation, you can follow on into the later part of the lactation as you start to get production increases from BST.

"But the rules of the game have

not changed," Hartnell said. "The feeding recommendations that are now in place don't need to be changed. It's just like feeding a higher producing cow."

In research work done with pastures and roughages as the main part of the ration, Hartnell said cows responded at the same magnitude as they do when fed high concentrate rations. But just like any other feeding program you need to get the cows in good condition before the next lactation starts. If you don't the subsequent lactation will be poor.

Dr. Walter Hobgood, director of marketing BST, said Monsanto is committed to help farmers with management input so that their product will work at its best on the farm. And while he agrees that the company has responsibility to educate the public on the safety of BST, he said the dairy industry also needs to help. "If the dairymen decide they want to use the product because of its benefits, then the dairy industry should help with consumer education too," he said.

Larry O'Neill, manager, public affairs, said surveys show that when consumers only think of BST as a hormone, they express concern about its use. But when they find out that BST occurs naturally in milk, they give a more positive response. In addition, when the facts are presented that BST is another efficiency tool to help keep the cost of milk competitive with soft drinks, consumers respond more favorably.

O'Neill said Monsanto has already embarked on a consumer education program by meeting with national consumer groups and New York editors of homemaker magazines. They also have discussed the issue with food marketers and retail food associations.



A mini-computer is used to keep track of feed consumption by cows involved in BST research.

And O'Neill said he would characterize these consumer groups' responses as informed and neutral.

As for animal rights' groups, O'Neill said he thinks it is going to be a very tough problem to deal with. "We will just need to fall back on the facts that cows do not object to the injection and we have no health problems from its use."

But if a person objects to giving a cow an injection other than for disease control, then we will just need to disagree."

O'Neill cited another survey that showed 80 percent of the respondents did not think it was

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