

# FOCUS

Pennsylvania

Dairy Herd

Improvement Association

Call 1-800-DHI-TEST for service or information.

## Educator, Inspirer — County Dairy Extension Agent

BY PAT PURCELL

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — "I see myself as an educator and even an inspirer. I try to make the farmer aware of what DHIA records have to offer to herd management. And I am concerned that the farmer use these records to evaluate herd management and trouble shoot problems," said Glenn Shirk, Lancaster County Dairy Extension Agent.

"It (DHIA information) is essential to the farmer to be kept up to date and aware of what is happening on his dairy farm, and to monitoring his operation. It is essential to the county agent, too. Before we can conduct a program for farmers we need to know the facts first," said Shirk.

Gathering herd data from nearly 6,000 members across the state The Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) has a storehouse of knowledge to offer not only members, but to all those who serve the farmer in making his farm profitable.

"If the farmer does not directly use the data, then his service people do, such as the vet and the feed man."

"The challenge to DHIA is taking the overwhelming amount of data and presenting the information in a form so that the message jumps out at you and entices the farmer to study it more," explained Shirk.

This is the challenge for the county extension agent also. The county agents rearrangement of information can show the farmer why and how the data is directly applicable to his business decisions.

There are innovative ways to bring DHIA records to life. This is an opportunity for the county dairy agent to be creative and arrange DHIA figures in a such a way that facilitates trouble shooting.

Putting lists of data into curves, graphs, tables and charts allows the farmer to see quickly and easily a clearer picture of his herd's performance.

For instance, creating lactation curves from production information vividly shows if the cow is peaking and sustaining the peak at her capability.

Shirk suggests developing lactation curves for different stages of development and separating cows by age groups to isolate problems even further. For instance, separating cows by age and production could help in determining if the first calf heifers are producing at the desired capacity.

"First calf heifers should be producing at least 85 percent of the herd average just to maintain the current level of production. This group could be pulling down the whole herd average," said Shirk. "The form in which the information is arranged can pinpoint herd management problems."

Although no two farms are alike there are similarities, and these similarities can help farmers make

some eye-opening comparisons. Comparing herd performance to that of other herds in the same production range can cause red flags go up in some problem areas.

**County Agent As Interpreter**  
This all relates to profitability. The county agent can help identify the information which the farmer needs. But information is of little value if it is not accessible. The association's goal is to serve the greatest number of its members. DHIA strives to present as much useful information as possible in a variety if limited number of reports.

As can be expected this volume of information in a limited space can lead to some complex and sometimes confusing reports. The county agent can assist the dairyman by interpreting some of the more complex reports. And while many farmers retrieve the information most important to them such as herd average, somatic cell count and individual production, there is a wealth of information untapped. And tapping this source can lead to a healthier business.

"I do not get involved in the DHIA organizational operation, but I do encourage farmers to util-

## Average Farm Feed Costs For Handy Reference

To help farmers across the state to have handy reference of commodity input costs in their feeding operations for DHIA record sheets or to develop livestock feed cost data, here's this week's average costs of various ingredients as compiled from regional reports across the state of Pennsylvania. Remember these are averages so you will need to adjust your figures up or down according to your location and the quality of your crop.

Corn, No. 2y - 2.74  
Wheat, No. 2 - 3.78  
Barley, No. 3 - 1.98  
Oats, No. 2 - 1.57  
Soybeans, No. 1 - 5.32  
Ear Corn, - 54.15  
Alfalfa Hay - 120.00  
Mixed Hay - 106.75  
Timothy Hay - 117

ize their services to be better businessmen," said Shirk. "In business, the profit motive can be the inspiration the farmer needs, but it depends on the individual. Sometimes health and production are their goals."

DHIA records are some of the tools available to the farmer. It's up to the county dairy agent to help the farmer to identify his goals, and, appealing to those goals, show the dairymen how his

records can help him succeed.

"We conduct workshops or informational meetings to illustrate what records can do for their herd management and we introduce them to their printed records, pull out the information they need and summarize the data into a form that they can easily apply to their situation," said Shirk.

**Income Over Feed Costs**  
There are some reports which  
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