

# FOCUS

Pennsylvania  
Dairy Herd  
Improvement Association

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## How Does Your Herd Compare?

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.)—This data is pulled from Pennsylvania DHIA's mainframe computer each week. It is a one-week summary representing approximately one-fourth of the herds on test, as they are tested monthly.

These data are valuable from a business management standpoint and can be used for comparing your operations to the averages from almost 1,400 herds across the state.

DHIA Averages for all herds processed between 12/19/89 and 12/26/89

Number of Herds Processed	1,235
Number of Cows Processed	70,910
Number of Cows Per Herd	57.4
Milk Per Cow (Lbs)	17,098
%-Fat	3.71
Fat Per Cow (Lbs)	635
%-Protein	3.20
Protein Per Cow (Lbs)	547
Average Days in Milk Per Cow	315
*Value for CWT Milk(\$)	13.50
*Value for CWT Grain(\$)	8.39
*Value for CWT Hay(\$)	4.23
*Value for CWT Silage(\$)	1.52
*Value for Pasture Per Day(\$)	.30
*Value for Milk Per Cow Per Year(\$)	2,309
*Feed Consumed Per Cow Per Year(Lbs)	
A: Grain	6,703
B: Hay	2,847
C: Silage	14,455
D: Day Pasture	66
*Feed Cost Per Cow Per Year(\$)	
A: Grain	562
B: Hay	120
C: Silage	219
D: Pasture	20

*Total Feed Cost Per Cow Per Year(\$)	923
*Income Over Feed Costs Per Year(\$)	1,386
*Grain to Milk Ratio	1:2.5
*Feed Cost Per CWT Milk(\$)	5.40
Avg Level For 983 SCC Herds	320,143
*Member generated figures	

## Be An Agronomist First

BY PAUL H. CRAIG  
Dauphin Co. Ag Agent

Experiences obtained from working with dairy farmers have shown that efficient dairy farmers are good agronomists first in order to be successful and prosperous producers. Milk production and profits per acre are closely related to increased legumes in forage stands and increased yields per acre.

Several keys to increasing profits are:

### 1. Improve forage yield per acre

Successful dairy farmers set production goals to obtain productive stands, optimize yields and quality, and improve stand persistence to maintain forage stand life. Successful production requires advanced planning and timely operations. Site selection, adequate soil fertility levels, maintenance top-dressing, weed and insect control, and cutting management all influence forage management. Remember that total yield per acre is only "half of the story."

### 2. Forage Selection

Variety selection is another key to increasing profits. Select forage species and varieties for disease resistance, winter-hardiness, fast regrowth, and yield potential. Productive varieties grown with top

management practices enable high quality and yields.

### 3. Quality Management

The "second half of the story" is to cut early to improve quality. Easier said than done, especially in a year like 1989. In general, alfalfa yields and stand persistence decline and weeds increase with cutting schedules having less than 30 days of regrowth. Top alfalfa producers start cutting by the mid-bud stage of maturity and leave 30-35 days between cuts. Forage producers need to evaluate weather possibilities to determine when to cut and escape rain damage. However, waiting often results in greater loss of feed value than accepting some rain damage.

### 4. Pest Control

Forage crop diseases are best controlled by selecting varieties with high levels of resistance to diseases commonly found in our area. These include Antracnose, Bacterial Wilt, Fusarium Wilt, Phytophthora Root Rot, and Verticillium Wilt. Remember that forage varieties are developed by selecting from a diverse population. Within this population, individual plants will vary widely in their response to a particular disease or pest. Some may be highly resistant and others very susceptible. A particular rating for resistance generally reflects the response to a majority of plants in that variety. The two major insect pests of forages occur on alfalfa. These are the alfalfa weevil and the potato leafhopper. These two pests affect quality, yields, and stand persistence. Fortunately the insects can be controlled; however, simply applying an insecticide during the growing season is usually not

economically beneficial. Growers need to identify insect pests, determine population levels, and evaluate stand maturity before applying control materials. Local Extension agents, crop scouts, and ag dealers can assist producers in developing an IPM program.

The introduction of weeds into a forage stand is usually dependent on multiple factors. These include cutting frequency, diseases, insects, winter injury, and reduced fertility levels. As plants become weaker they produce smaller crowns and fewer stems. Eventually the plant dies and the stand becomes thinner. The reduced vigor and thinning of stands may permit the encroachment of weeds.

### 5. Forage testing and ration balancing

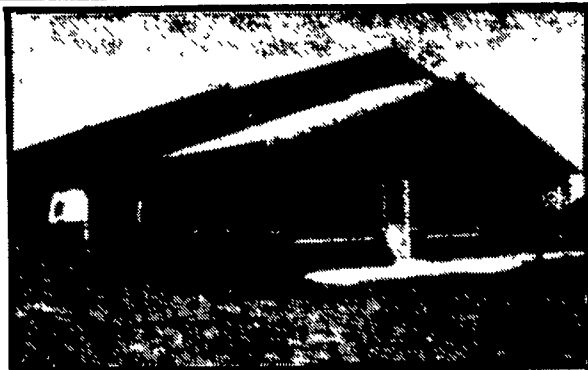
To use forage efficiently, dairymen must test forage supplies and balance feed programs to obtain the quality produced on the farm. Variation in species and management and environmental conditions will greatly affect forage quality. Producers need to be reminded that there is vast difference in forage quality and that this difference greatly influences their herd production levels.

Someone else once said this regarding records "You can't change the tune if you don't have the records." Winter time provides the opportune time for forage producers to evaluate their own production practices and records. As stated earlier, forage production profitability is closely linked to overall farm profitability. Good records and their utilization in farm planning can assist many management decisions.

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