

Mylin Observes Changes In The Needs Of Dairymen

EVERETT NEWSWANGER
Managing Editor

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.)—For this superior supervisor, 25 years of service to Pennsylvania DHIA gives him a good overview of where dairying has been and where it will go in the next ten years.

Jay Mylin, Manheim, Lancaster County's DHIA manager, recently received the superior recognition from the state association. And in an interview Monday afternoon, Mylin said the needs of dairymen for management information have increased over the years. The lactation records that historically have been provided by DHIA are no longer sufficient to provide for the dairymen's needs.

"No doubt about it," Mylin said. "Dairymen are different managers than we saw 20 years ago. Young dairymen coming into the business are really working to utilize the information we can provide. These dairymen need to be concerned about all the different aspects of herd management. Not only lactation records but also feed costs and breeding records."

The computer has allowed Mylin to summarize all the information in the DHIA reports so the good managers are able to pinpoint anything they want to know about their herd. For example, the DHIA summary data that Mylin provides for one herd owner is used to group the cows according to production and feeding needs. The information that formerly took hours to assemble can now be provided

shortly after the central lab has processed the test samples.

Another useful use of a dairymen's DHIA records comes when he wants to establish a line of credit. Mylin has spent several days with credit managers to help them know what to look for in the DHIA records that will show the management ability of the dairymen.

"You can look in the bulk tank, but you don't know how many cows it took to produce the milk," Mylin said. "With DHIA records the banker can see the production per cow, and the feed costs. He can then compare these records to the average in the county and the state to get some information about the dairymen's management ability."

Even dairymen ask Mylin what is good. And one way to rate good is to compare with the averages. Mylin said the weekly FOCUS page in Lancaster Farming has been useful for just such comparisons.

For Mylin, the county DHIA management position is part-time. He spends about two days per week on his testing circuit. The remainder of his time is spent on relief testing for others who may be ill and in hiring and training new supervisors as needed.

Because of the new options offered by DHIA, Lancaster County DHIA has been able to increase their number of cows on test by 2000 while the cow numbers in the county decreased 6,000.

"I'm pleased that we have a lot more options," Mylin said. "We have the managers who want all the information they can get. But we

also have dairymen who don't want more than the basic information. And now we can provide a program for them too. This has been a real benefit for us in Lancaster County.

Mylin said he does not expect on-farm computers to replace the dairymen's desire for DHIA records.

"I don't think we will see a large number of farm computers on the family farm in the next 10 years," Mylin said. "Most dairymen have so much to do that I think they will still be willing to pay a fair price for this service."

The most likely prospect for a farm computer is the large herd and Mylin tests five or six herds with more than 200 cows. These large herds are on DHIA test and use the DHIA information very well. And while the trend is toward commercial herds, even the breeder herds now are a lot more concerned about the bottom line.

"Farmers still register their cows which is great," Mylin said. "But we see the difference where even the owner of a registered herd needs to watch the bottom line. For the dairymen who does not make this adjustment in management, he has some struggles ahead. I see some dairymen who still have this mind set, but the younger generation, even though they want to sell breeding stock, will not keep a cow around just because she has a good pedigree."

Mylin said it is important to recognize that DHIA only keeps score and does not set the trend in the dairy business. For example,



Jay Mylin, Lancaster County's DHIA manager, has developed information that puts a dollar value on some of the information that can be obtained from DHIA members.

DHIA can't do much about component pricing for milk. But if DHIA can give the dairymen an edge, that's what they want to do.

Mylin thinks the real edge DHIA can give the dairymen is in the profitability of his herd. He has compiled figures based on \$12 milk and a 50-cow herd that show a dramatic increase in profit with only small management changes based on information that DHIA provides their members each month. For example, if you decrease the calving interval from 14 to 13 months, you increase your income by \$6,200. If you decrease your soma-

tic cell count by 50 percent, you increase profit another \$3,400.

If you save one pound of grain per cow per day by having records to feed correctly, you gain about \$1,300 and if you increase the rolling herd average by 1,000 lbs., even with the extra feed costs to get the production, you still have a \$5000 higher income.

To me dairying is the most exciting business in agriculture because there are 101 different management decisions you can make to change the income for that dairy herd. And that's what makes our job in DHIA is so important.

Herd Feed Improvements, Love Of Cows Create Results

ANDY ANDREWS

Lancaster Farming Staff

RUSSELL (Warren Co.)—There are many joys to dairy farming, above and beyond the 24-hour-a-day worries that the cows are fed correctly, are healthy, and that the hundredweight price of milk won't drop even further.

A dairy farm often provides the best environment for children who enjoy working with cows, at least in the eyes of many dairy families. "You have to enjoy working with cows to be in the dairy business," said Pam Donaldson. Together with her husband, Mike, they manage a 125-acre dairy farm (40 tillable, 85 rented) right on top of the Pennsylvania/New York state border.

But it was a combination of improved herd management tech-

niques and placing their herds on total mixed rations (TMR) in June of 1989 that, more than a year later, paid off in terms of production. The Donaldsons were able to increase their rolling herd average in total milk pounds by nearly 3,000 pounds, making them number 1 in improvements for the Brown Swiss breed. They also placed number 1 in total increase in protein, by nearly 100 pounds, for the breed.

"We purchased the farm from Mike's dad (Jack Donaldson), and I suppose we were allowed to make our own mistakes," said Pam, laughing. "But it was the combination of TMR and determining what cows stayed and those that did not that helped."

It took more than a full year before the results became known.

The Donaldsons work with Wayne Mill in using the TMR, a balance in the forage of 2/3 corn silage and 1/3 haylage on a dry matter basis. A commercial pellet feed and a buffer packet are used to provide additional balance, depending on the forage test conducted every other month.

"We can't buy good forages up in this part of the state, and we feed what we can raise," said Mike. The response to the TMR proved valuable, though, when the Donaldsons saw the results after the cows were freshened.

The Donaldsons manage 53 head of Brown Swiss (28 mature and 25 heifers and calves) and 26 head of Holstein (14 mature, 12 heifers and calves). The Holsteins rolling herd average is 15,168 lbs, M 3.7% F, 3.2% P.

The cows are arranged in a tie stall. The Donaldsons use the bucket milking technique using an automatic milker into a 55-pound enclosed pail, where the milk is later transferred to the holding tank. Someday, according to Pam, the farm may purchase a pipeline milker.

But the Pennsylvania DHIA has done their part to help the Donaldsons in the farm operation.

"When you're on DHIA, you have to test each month," said Pam. "The testing forces you to pay attention to the cows you breed, how you manage them, and what's going on with your herd. It's easy to overlook those things if you're not on test."

Mike Donaldson begins the farm day by arriving to feed the cows by 4:30 a.m. At 5:30 a.m., he milks the cows, and finishes about 8 a.m. The rest of the day, there are additional chores, including taking care of the haylage and mixing the rations.

The cows are milked twice a day. Pam takes care of the dry cows and returns to feed the cows again at 4 p.m. She milks the cows at 5 p.m. It isn't until about 9 p.m.

that the working day is done.

"It's a long day," said Pam. "But we are in business for ourselves. We enjoy working with the cows. To be in dairy farming, you have to love working with cows."

Pam and Mike met at Delaware Valley College, where they were both dairy science majors. They purchased the farm this year from Mike's father, Jack, who grew up on the farm. Jack still helps on the farm although he's "retired from farming," said Pam. The farm is nearly a 100 years old, but has been in the family only about 20 years.

Pam said that, in addition to farming, she also works at the Russell Veterinary Hospital on a part-time basis. "My job is in the Embryo Transfer Program, a new aspect of the hospital," she said. "Dr. Patrick Farrell, DVM, MS, is not only my employer, he is also our herd veterinarian. We are on a monthly herd health check — this keeps us up to date on the reproductive state of all our cows."

The Donaldsons have three children, Sarah, 10; Christopher, 8; and Kevin, 5.



Donaldson's Starshine Farm raises all of the calves in hutches. Pictured here are, left to right Sarah, 10; Kevin, 5; and Christopher, 8.

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