

Milking Parlor Smorgasbord

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is a wider lane at the end of the return exit.

They use a dual vacuum system; one for milking, one for washing. A transfer tank is employed with a pre-cooling plate. The transfer tank also serves as a washing tank.

With 600 gallons of washwater in the system, delivered at 45 gallons a minutes, the worker has 12 minutes to use it to hose down the parlor and holding area.

Representatives from parlor building companies gave presentations — like commercial breaks — between talks by dairy academicians.

In the afternoon, Larry Jones, from Cornell University, discussed the need for installing a parlor with computerization and instrumentation to weigh milk.

He said that the use of any information gathering device has to be valued. The way it is valued is to determine how the information is used to make better management decisions and the profits realized from those decisions.

The value of an item is equal to the ratio of the profits realized by a decision to the cost of obtaining that information. If it breaks even, he said it doesn't make much sense to get the information. He said the ratio should be at least two to one.

Jones also warned of managing too much on a day-to-day basis and missing the "big picture."

He said that it is better to manage on a preventative basis — to work with items like days open and lactation lengths on a herd basis. And in his opinion, continuing to use DHIA is the only way to get the information necessary.

There are programs in development now, such as DHIA's LERP (Labor Efficient Records Program) which is being used on five farms in Pennsylvania and on six farms in New York.

He said the LERP program integrates some of the information collecting and processing abilities on the farms with DHIA. It depends on two tests a year on the farm.

Whether those two milk tests are enough for a dairy manager, each individual will have to decide.

He said that many of the electronic programs available to dairymen are not standardized, not compatible to DHIA, require the dairyman to have the time, finances, typing skills use them and do not guarantee that the information gathered is going to be interpreted accurately or used well.

He said that because of the lack of some standardization with programs, the situation now is "caveat emptor," or "let the buyer beware."

However, the price of computer equipment is coming down and the abilities are increasing. He said that, for roughly \$4,000, a person could buy a system to run information program for his own farm, his

neighbor's farm and still "have enough left over so the kids could play computer games."

According to Jones, DHIA should still be used even when a computerized system is in place or the farm. He provided several anecdotes of how some people fell into problems when dropping from DHIA testing as a management tool.

Several dairymen said they enjoyed the seminar, especially the mix of commercial representation with purely educational presentation.

According to Glenn Shirk, Lancaster County extension dairy agent, the mixed seminars will continue to be used. They are seen as a way of providing those who attend the seminars a look at a wide variety of choices, the make contacts and to gather information on what is really available before deciding whether or not to commit to a change in program.

Jeff and Sue Werner, Lebanon, attended the meeting. Though they farm a stanchion operation, they said they wanted to see what was

new in dairy equipment.

"What I liked most was in the beginning, they had some basic facts, such as how much a parlor would cost, what the level of cows would be needed to sustain a system," Jeff said.

Of the commercial offerings, Sue said, "I think it would be hard to determine which company to go with."

Jeff added, "But I like it set up that way. It breaks it up. You're better able to concentrate."

Steve Mason, of Nottingham, Chester County, is in a family partnership which milks 150 registered Holsteins out of a double-eight herringbone parlor and till 600 acres.

Mason said he was attending the seminar because he's been looking at ways to make the operation more efficient.

As it is now, Mason said their it takes five hours a day to milk the herd twice with two people milking at a time.

The farm has had a parlor for more than 30 years. It was one of the first free-stall farms in the area,

he said.

What he looking to eliminate is more labor on the farm and possibly go to a one-man milking system.

Of the number of people who attended the seminar, Mason said, "I think people were surprised at the number of people and maybe asking themselves, 'Why, with a depressed economy, this many people would be willing to spend money?'"

"It's because of efficiency," Mason said. "In tight times, you can't stop (getting more cost-effective), you have to go ahead cautiously."

As to what Larry Jones and others discussed about the need for DHIA, Mason said his brother Alan has a computer he works with.

"We're on DHIA, but basically we're in our infancy of utilizing the records. I wanted to ask that question and I think it was answered nicely," he said. "It's kind of like a tractor, information is a tool. You have to analyze. You have to determine if it's going to make you money."

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