

Checklist: Setting Goals For A New Year

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DANVILLE (Montour Co.) — With the beginning of a new year, it is a good time to take a look at your herd management to see where you are and where you would like to be at the end of the year.

With predictions of lower milk prices during 1991, any small improvement in management that you can make will mean money in your pocket.

What are some of the things you should look at? What are reasonable goals to shoot for during the coming year?

Let's take a look.

✓ Feed-cost is the single largest out-of-pocket expense in producing milk.

What is the true cost of feed to produce milk in your herd?

The state average, reported on DHIA is \$5.40. What is your cost? Can you do a better job of using lower cost feeds and still meet the needs of your cows?

✓ A reasonable goal is to strive for a grain-to-milk ratio of 1:3. Current DHIA records in this area show an average of 1:2.5. This indicates that some cows are being fed more grain than they probably need. This is probably true in late lactation, in some herds.

✓ No more than 10 percent of your cows should be fat and no more than 10 percent should be thin. Use the cow condition scoring system to see how your herd is doing. Cows in proper condition when freshening do better throughout the lactation, with fewer health problems.

✓ Are you cows eating a minimum of 2 percent of their body-weight in forage dry matter? That is the equivalent of 2 pounds of hay per 100 pounds of cow. A reasonable goal is to increase this to 2.3 percent.

✓ A reasonable goal is to stay below 200,000 average somatic cell count for the year.

If you are running higher, milking procedures, milking system and dry cow treatment should be looked at carefully. If you are maintaining an average of 140,000 of below, you are doing an excellent job.

✓ A reasonable goal for calving interval is 12.5 months. A longer calving interval would suggest that first services may be delayed or heat detection may be lacking.

✓ If your cows are open more than 100 days on average, you need to take a long look at your breeding program.

✓ Days open to first service should average no more than 70 to 75 days. To accomplish this, you will need to start breeding at 60 days after freshening. Do you have pre-breeding checks by your vet? Are your cows ready to breed at 60 days?

✓ You should have no more than 10 percent of your cows open for 150 days or more. A higher percentage would indicate poor heat detection, weak heats or poor breeding practices.

✓ No more than 15 percent of your herd should be bred three times or more. A greater percentage suggests severe breeding problems.

✓ Services per conception is a true measure of your breeding efficiency. You should average no more than 1.7 breeding services for each confirmed pregnancy.

✓ The amount of milk sold per man will be different for different types of operations due to the difference in labor requirements.

Reasonable goals are 500,000 pounds per man in a stall barn and 600,000 pounds per man in a free stall.

If you are buying all you feed and just milking cows, a reasonable goal is 850,000 pounds per man.

How much are you selling?

✓ Did you increase your milk sold per cow by 200 pounds over the last year? This is a reasonable goal to strive for.

✓ The percent of cows in milk is another measure of breeding efficiency and culling rate. You should have at least 86 percent of your cows milking at all time to get efficient milk production.

✓ At least 30 percent of your herd should be first lactation heifers. A lower percentage would indicate a lower-than-normal culling rate. First calf heifers are the main way to improve your herd.

✓ If you have lost more than five percent of your calves during the past 12 months, it would suggest that you need to review your calf starting and calf raising techniques. This should start with where the cow freshens, and if the calf gets colostrum soon after birth.

✓ You should be freshening heifers at 22 to 24 months of age to start recovering your investment in raising that replacement. This also gives more opportunity for culling for improvement.

✓ To freshen heifers at an early age, they must be bred at 13 to 15 months of age. This requires that a good start and a good heifer-raising

program must be followed to get heifers to breeding size by this age.

This includes adequate housing, good parasite control and proper vaccinations as well as an adequate and well-balanced ration.

✓ Both winter and summer ventilation must be adequate.

✓ As long as you have cows you will have some health problems. How much is too much?

For milk fever, fewer than five percent of your herd should have milk fever in a year.

Ketosis — a reasonable goal is less than four percent of the herd with ketosis during a year.

Off feed — you should have fewer than five percent of the herd affected by off-feed problems during any 12-month period.

These health problems indicate some problem with the balance of the ration, including not only the nutrients, but the form of the feed being fed.

✓ Do you have an organized vaccination program for your herd? Does it include both young stock and adult cows? Work with your vet to develop a program to include IBR, BVD, P13 and LEPTO.

✓ How often do you balance

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your dairy rations? Who does it?

Does it include protein, energy, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, Vitamins A, D and E, selenium and other trace minerals as well as dry matter intake from forages?

Your ration should be reviewed on a regular basis by a competent feed person, and especially when you are changing forages to any great extent.

✓ One of the critical areas in herd management is to have an adequate supply of good forage. How much do you need?

Calculate on the basis of 2½

pounds of hay equivalent per 100 pounds of cow or heifer (for example, a 50-cow herd with 50 young stock would use 2,250 pounds of forage a day, or 410 tons per year.)

✓ Check out your cropping plans. Can you raise enough forage for your herd?

Must you buy some? Make some arrangements now for the next 12 months.

If it sounds like a lot of things to think about, you're right. And there is more. Dairy herd management is not easy.

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