

Use Rolling Herd Averages To Manage Dairy Herd

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NEWARK, Del. — Again and again I am asked why we publish and promote rolling total herd milk, fat and protein averages? The question comes out of the concern that some state organizations publish and promote actual milking cows-only records. Either approach has merit.

When I read that a farmer has a herd average of 25,000 lbs. milk per cow, I have questions. How was this figure derived? Was this the total milk the farmer shipped to the processing plant every day on average for the last year? Or was this average only for cows that completed a lactation during the year? And over how many months — 10, 12 or more?

Individual outstanding cows are always in demand, of course. A herd made up of outstanding cows would draw people interested in selecting a dam for a future bull as a stud purchase or for a private herd, or maybe a future heifer buy. Deals like this can make a significant contribution to herd income. In fact, a few herds have become national and world leaders this way, generating important export deals.

Such herds succeed regardless of size. For example, Winterthur near Wilmington, Del., offered outstanding Holsteins for years as does Arlinda in California currently, and for Ayrshires, there's Ardrossan not far from Philadelphia.

However, the great majority of dairy herds derive only a minor

portion of their herd income from the sale of outstanding cows and bulls. Most dairy herds, often termed "commercial," get between 80- and 90-percent of their herd income from the sale of milk. This means that the herd owner is interested in the herd milk average for all cows in the herd at a given time, not just those that complete a lactation during the year.

The herd owner is very much aware of those cows that did not complete a lactation during the year. How many were there, and what was the percentage in the herd? These cows, referred to as "dry" and/or "open," reduce the herd milk average, but continue to consume feed, require labor for feeding and milking, take up building space the same as the high-producing cows do and, possibly, incur additional veterinary costs.

Herd records on how much these cows produce reflect the financial efficiency story of the herd management. For this reason, I am more interested in publishing and promoting the rolling total herd averages. It gives the herd owner a measure of the number of freeloaders which the rest of the milking cows have to "carry" when it comes to paying bills.

Whether freeloaders are immediate or later candidates for the stockyard depends on total herd management objectives. But all the while, costs keep adding up from those cows that do not contribute their share in filling the farm tank.

Farmers talk with pride to their

neighbors and farmers in other states, comparing notes on the performance of their cows and herds. And farmers deserve to have pride in their individual top cows. This enthusiasm carries dairy people through the daily drudgery and frustrations, and it feels good to outdo a neighbor or relative.

However, the business end of dairy farming requires that we reduce the number of freeloaders we feed and care for. Rolling Herd averages, not Milking Cows-Only or Completed Lactations-Only averages, reveal whether some cows are not producing up to par and how many.

Three important parameters can tell more precisely what is going on: age at first calving, calving interval and average days in milk. The age at first calving tells when heifers start paying back the investment in being raised to 24 months of age or later.

Calving interval is important, because it includes the number of days open or dry, and repeat breeders with long calving intervals are freeloaders. When the calving interval is longer, the Rolling Milk Production average per cow per year is less and fewer calves are produced and available per year. Also the farmer has fewer cows available for culling to improve genetics, and he has more veterinary and breeding bills, but less income from milk and sale of animals.

Average days in milk is another important parameter, because the more cows in the herd that have average days in milk before the middle of lactation, the more are

in peak lactation and this helps fill up the herd tank faster, better and easier. These cows are the opposite of freeloaders.

All of these parameters correlate directly with money in the bank, an important consideration

now that milk prices are so low. Overall, our interest in Rolling Herd averages, not just for milk, but for fat and protein content as well as somatic cell counts, is the best direction for better herd profitability.

N.J. Hort Expo Set

TRENTON, N.J. — The New Jersey FFA Horticultural Exposition, scheduled for the Quaker Bridge Mall, Route 1, Lawrenceville, consists of two state FFA events.

The state FFA floral design contest, sponsored by the New Jersey Florists' Association, will be held Friday, March 15. The State FFA Flower Show, with more than 600 plants and flower arrangements exhibited, will begin on Friday, March 15 and end on Sunday, March 17 at 6 p.m.

The floral design contest is open to all FFA members in New Jersey. Members will design two arrangements on location. One design will be assigned by the judges and the other will be the choice of the student. Arrangements will be scored and winners

will be announced later that day. The students' designs will be available for sale after all scoring takes place. All proceeds will go towards premiums for the Flower Show.

Students competing in the Flower Show will be entering arrangements and plant material that they have designed or grown in school. More than 50 different theme classes are available for students to enter. Preparing an arrangement for a formal dinner party is one example of a theme class. Arrangements may be entered in the "fresh" or "silk and dried" categories.

Ribbons will be awarded to the top five entries in each class, and a rosette will be awarded to the best of division entry. In addition, the Best of Show Award will be presented.

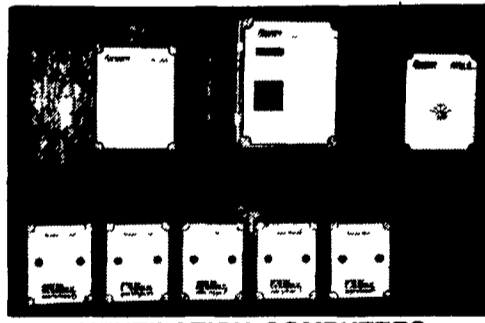
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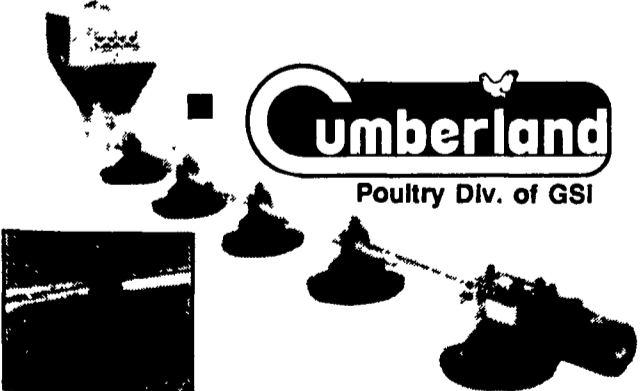
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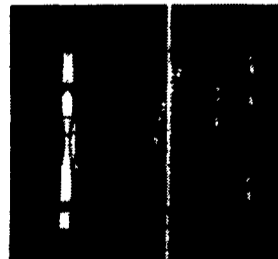
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