

Laptop Computers Come To The Barn

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Pa.DHIA, in cooperation with the Penn State Extension programs in many areas, is currently holding educational meetings across the state for dairymen and technicians who wish to learn more about the new tools being offered.

The purpose for having something that flexible is so the farmer can understand the information without needing an interpreter, and also so that he can get detailed, pertinent information and estimates for herd management within minutes, rather than days.

That also means the role of the milk technician is to change slightly.

Genth and the others will not be required to learn beyond the stage of a competent user of the programs written for a laptop computer.

However, because of her computer-learning background, Genth is one of the technicians advanced enough to be comfortable taking the laptop computer into the barn.

At this time, Genth and the other advanced technicians are doing double-work — they enter the milk sampling and other herd management data into the portable computer in addition to using a pencil to mark the same figures and notes into the large-page barn sheets carried in a file book.

Both sets of information are sent to Pa.DHIA headquarters in State College. The computer-entered data is transferred via telephone hookup.

The differences are great, in terms of time delay.

The actual paper entries are mailed from the technician, at least 24-hours later, and because of the system, up to three days after the data is gathered.

Genth said that once the paper barn sheet gets to State College, there are other delays. There are two auditors who check over all

the barn sheets for errors. That's thousands of data for two people.

And then the process involves more people preparing the data to be sent back to the farmer-client.

In the meantime, the dairyman could use the information for making all kinds of herd management decisions, such as breeding, health management, etc.

The time difference is substantial for Genth's clients.

It comes down to the fact that processing all the handwritten data is a tedious and time-consuming, whereas sending information from one computer to the other requires few steps and little time.

The speed of entering data into the main computer reflects a quickening not only on the total turn-around, but in the ability of the farmer to see the progress of his herd within the same week, rather than find out later.

The potential efficiency and long-term cost savings from using computers in the barn are apparent.

If it all sounds too good to be true, it currently is for most, but only because the process of implementing all the advantages of the program requires training and educating people to using the new farm tools.

Pa.DHIA is doing the duplication of effort on barn sheets to verify accuracy with the computer-telephone-computer information transfer system.

Widespread implementation of the computer system also depends on the quickness with which technicians become computer efficient, how fast dairymen learn of the advantages to using the information, and how well the two communicate to put together a customized program.

For those somewhat familiar with computer programs, the barn sheet and Dairy Comp 305 are based on windows, rather than straight menu selection.

Although a mouse, which is a



While Linda Genth is one of the Pa.DHIA testers using the laptop computer to enter testing data on a barn sheet, she also continues to enter data by pencil as a backup until Pa.DHIA management is certain of the accuracy of the laptop computer.

device for moving a computer screen cursor unidirectionally, could conceivably be used with the programs, that isn't apparently the direction being taken.

There are critics of the laptops in the barn.

One complaint is that keyboard functions are not apparent — that is, certain keys or combinations thereof are used to perform a task which the keyboard already has keys to perform.

The reason for that is because of the levels of use within the program. Major movements within a program are accomplished more straightforward on the keyboard,

while work performed within a document requires the adapted keyboard codes.

For example, within a document, moving the cursor in a direction requires the uses of two keys.

Another potential problem is working with dust-sensitive equipment in a dusty environment. The laptops that technicians currently use employ plastic dust covers over the keyboard.

Technicians are also discovering that a lightweight, portable, wheeled laptop and milk-test sample holder would be a blessing. Genth currently uses barrels, or other objects, found in the barn

where she is testing.

(Given the ingenuity of the farming community, however, it is not expected to take long before someone comes up with a design that technicians would welcome; something that, in addition to the previous characteristics, could also withstand frequent washing, would not present any hard-to-clean areas, and which could be made to be compact and easily stored in a car trunk or back seat area.)

However, Pa.DHIA officials have mounted a recent intensive effort to compile a book explaining the functions of the management programs the association offers, and they have put together a heavy schedule for touring the state to hold educational meetings within the districts.

The use of the laptop computer system takes a little mental adjustment from other layman computer uses, according to Genth, but it isn't difficult to grasp.

The Dairy Comp 305, for example, offers 14 reports for dairymen.

Data can be entered, recalled and reworked within the 14 reports for an almost limitless customizing of information for the dairyman.

The reports are Individual Cow Cards, Test Day Production, Due To Calve, Due To Dry Off, Open Cows, Heifers, a Veterinarian's list (for cows under care), bred 90 days, production by name, ME production, high ME cows, a reproductive summary list, a list of those with new infections, and breeding summaries.

The amount of data each technician can have accessible within the small laptops is tremendous. All pertinent information, other than milk test, on each cow in each herd serviced by the technician is immediately available.

Information which requires more exact milk component data still requires a delay, until testing can be performed and the information is entered.

Genth said she is happy with the direction the job of technician is taking, because of the challenges it poses, and because of the increased usefulness of the services provided.



Pat Toretti, Pa.DHIA ARIS administrator, shows a farmer attending a computer programming seminar some of the characteristics of the laptop computer and the Dairy Comp 305 program options.

Mid East UDIA Sets Meetings

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Mid East United Dairy Industry Association will host six regional meetings for dairy farmers to present the 1993 advertising and marketing programs funded by the 10-cent dairy promotion investment.

All dairy farmers in the Federal Milk Marketing Areas 33 and 36 — Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and parts of West Virginia and northern Kentucky — are invited, as well as anyone else interested in dairy promotion.

Mid East UDIA is one of 20 regional promotion associations and affiliated Dairy Council units of the United Dairy Industry Association that receives 10 cents of the 15-cent dairy promotion investment. The remaining 5 cents funds the National Dairy board for complementary programming.

"Unified dairy promotion will be stronger than ever in 1993," said Mid East UDIA General Manager Scott Higgins.

UDIA member organizations, NDB, and the West Coast promotion groups in California, Oregon and Washington are to contribute

\$7 million toward a unified national fluid milk advertising strategy - "Milk, It Does a Body Good."

Higgins said that the campaign's single budget and single focused theme will result in greater consumer impact.

"Dairy farmers will receive 25 percent more advertising for their dollar when all of the organizations combine their money to purchase network advertising."

Mid East UDIA is also planning numerous campaigns for cheese, butter and ice cream with promotion partners such as the National Dairy Board, Nabisco, Hershey Foods and the Beef Industry Council.

Nutrition education programs also play a vital role in increasing dairy product sales by emphasizing their value as part of a healthy diet for people of all ages.

"Mid East UDIA has set a priority of targeting schools with our nutrition education messages," Higgins said. "By adding a school breakfast program that serves milk, school cafeterias have great potential to increase Class I sales

by as much as 360 million pounds annually."

The meetings are scheduled for Tuesday, March 2, Holiday Inn, Wapakoneta, Ohio; Wednesday, March 3, Fisher Auditorium (OARDC), Wooster, Ohio; Thursday, March 4, Days Inn, Meadville, Ohio; Monday, March 8, Grave Creek Mound State Park, Moundsville, W.Va.; and Tuesday, March 9, Ramada Inn, Somerset, Pa.

Registration will begin at 11 a.m. and the meetings will be from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. A lunch buffet will be served. There is no charge to attend the luncheon meetings.

A special breakfast meeting will be held Saturday, April 17, from 8:30 - 9 a.m., in conjunction with the Ohio Spring Dairy Spectacular at the Ohio State Fairgrounds in Columbus. There will be a \$2 breakfast donation that will benefit the Dairy Spectacular.

Reservations for all of the meetings should be made at least seven days prior to the meeting by calling Mid East UDIA toll free, 1-800-292-6455.