



GLENN'S UDDERINGS

By
Glenn A. Shirk

Lancaster Extension
Dairy Agent

WHERE IS YOUR HERD HEADING?

(Part 3 of a 3-part series)

One thing that good managers do is monitoring the progress of their businesses to see if they are heading forward or backwards. They work to reinforce their strengths and to correct any problems they detect. Dairy farmers should be no different.

In this 3-part series, I have attempted to indicate how dairy farmers and their advisors can use their Penna. and Raleigh DHIA records as a tool for monitoring what is happening with dairy herds and for predicting future trends.

The first article, written about a month ago, focused on using peak daily milk production per cow and persistency of production as indicators of what direction future milk production might be heading. Percent fat and protein is a reflection of feeding practices and cows' energy balance, both of which have a major impact on cows' future performance as it relates to: dry matter intakes, ketosis, DA's, milk production, conception rates, lameness, culling rates and replacement costs.

The second article, written about two weeks ago, looked at percent heats detected and percent of services that were successful and the impact they have on days open and future calving intervals. Long calving intervals can indicate a reduction in future milk production, the number of calves to be born and the number of replacements that will be available. High cull rates and a high incidence of forced, involuntary cullings, indicate that future replacement costs per year and per cwt. of milk shipped will be high, and the rate of genetic progress in the herd will slow down, especially if too many good cows had to be culled prematurely.

This article, the third one in the series, focuses on genetic trends, SCC trends, and other trends as reflected by cows' body conditions.

GENETICS

To remain competitive, dairy producers need to be making genetic progress in their herds. There are several indicators that can help reveal where their herds are heading genetically. One place to look for clues is on your Penna. and Raleigh DHIA Herd Summary reports.

What is the genetic profile of your service sires? The higher their PTA's, the better the production genetics of your herd's future offspring. To date, genetic evaluations have been heavily weighted for production. This will start to change with future sire proofs; they will start relying more on net merit indexes, which consider cows' udder health (SCC) and productive life (longevity) as well as milk production and component

yields. As you study the PTA's and PA's of service sires, compare those of the A.I. proven sires you use with those of A.I. young sires or herd sires you also use. Which ones have the highest PTA's and which ones are you using most heavily in your herd?

Another area to check is the PTA's of your cows and their sires. If you have been selecting good sires for genetic improvement of the herd, your first lactation cows should have the highest PTA's. Do they? As you compare first lactation cows with older cows, remember that you are comparing a group of uncullers (first lactation heifers) with a group of older cows that were good enough to survive the initial cullings. Once the poorer cows are culled from the first lactation group, their average PTA's may improve — unless problems force you to involuntarily cull too many genetically superior heifers.

To get an idea if you are culling too many of your better cows, check the average PTA's of cows voluntarily culled for low production with PTA's for cows removed for other reasons. If the PTA's for cows removed for other reasons is much higher than that of cows culled for low production, you are losing some good genetics. The question is, are they being sold for what they are worth as breeding stock? If so, that's good. If not, it's costing you money. You can find some of this information at the bottom of your Raleigh DHIA Estimated Relative Producing Ability (ERPA) List, which is printed twice a year.

Are you using the best bulls on your best animals? Notice that I did not say best cows. Your best animals should be heifers not yet bred. Is this the group you are breeding to your herd sire? If so, how does your herd sire's PTA or PA compare with PTA's of the A.I. sires you have been using? If A.I. sires were used on the heifers, could you get them settled? If not, would it be worth the effort and expense to use heat detection aids and to synchronize heats to improve heat detection and conception rates with A.I.?

Another indicator of genetic progress is the number of cows on your Raleigh DHIA Monthly Reports that have a "\$\$" code typed in the "date due" column. Offspring from these matings should be in the top 5% genetic group in the U.S. These cows have greater market value as breeding stock and, if merchandised effectively, could increase future income from cattle sales.

SOMATIC CELL COUNTS

Is mastitis in your herd like a smoldering fire that goes unnoticed until it flares up and gets out of control? Smoldering mastitis problems can erupt into big, expensive problems in the near future because of: lost milk pro-

duction, loss of quality premium payments, loss of a milk market, treatment costs, dumped milk, loss of good genetic stock due to forced cullings, reduced sale value of cattle, increased replacement costs, etc.

Your DHIA records can help point out where udder infections and herd profits are heading. Let's start with the DHIA Herd Summary report. Look at what percent of the herd has SCC scores of 5 or higher, and what is the trend from month to month? If the total percent of cows in these categories is 10-20% or higher, and climbing, it may be a sign that contagious mastitis is about to get out of control. Before it does, corrective action should be taken soon — while you still have a fighting chance. Fighting mastitis is like fighting a fire. A one-alarm fire is easier to bring under control than the five-alarm fire that it could turn into if not controlled properly and quickly enough.

If too many of your cows are code 5 or higher, check the Herd Summary report to see if most of them are older cows. They could be spreading infection to your first calf heifers, and your heifers could be falling into the same costly pattern you are now experiencing with the older cows. An indication that the spread of contagious infections from older cows to younger heifers is not being controlled is a gradual increase in the SCC level of first calf heifers as they progress through their lactation.

Another place to check is the SCC Summary report. How many times were infected cows severely infected this lactation, and how does this compare with months (or days) in milk? If you have been treating clinical cases and dry-treating cows, and they are still high month after month, they might have incurable staph infections. Such cows are a major threat to other healthier cows in

the herd, because they act as seeds of infection.

Consult your veterinarian for help in designing and implementing a mastitis prevention and control program for your herd. Use your DHIA records to monitor udder health trends in your herd. Attack problems quickly, before they get out of control.

BODY CONDITION

Managing cows' energy reserves properly is essential in high producing herds! It is one of the major challenges facing today's dairy farmers. A good indicator of how well cows' energy reserves are being managed is their body condition scores.

Scoring cows regularly is something dairy farmers and their advisors need to do more diligently. Equally important is recording these scores and entering them into a system that enables the data to be summarized into useful herd management reports. DHIA is just beginning to make this tool available. Ask your DHIA technician for more information, and make plans to do this important task on a regular basis.

If cows are scoring 4 or more at time of dry off or at calving time, it can be a sign that you can expect more problems in the future in the form of: calving difficulties, depressed appetites, ketosis, thin cows, poorer conception, etc. If cows drop more than 1 body condition score within the first month or so after calving, expect many of the same problems mentioned above. If scores drop below 2.5, it will be harder to catch cows in heat; expect more cysts, drastic drop in conception rates plus lower protein and fat tests, which translates into lower milk prices.

If cows are 2 to 4 months away from drying off and still score no higher than 2.5 or so, you will need to put about 250 lbs. of weight on them to raise their body score up to 3.5-3.75 by dry-off

time. Do you have enough time left in the lactation to get this job done? To do so, cows will need to gain 2 to 4 lbs. per day while still producing milk. If they fail to do this, they may come fresh next lactation out of condition and not ready to work (the sophomore slump syndrome). It is best to get cows in proper flesh before drying them off rather than expecting to put weight on them during the dry period, at a time when the fetus is making its most rapid growth. Another advantage of accomplishing this during lactation is, you put the weight on cows more cheaply when they are in milk, and if cows go dry in uniform flesh you will have a more uniform group of dry cows, which is much easier to manage properly.

Conversely, if cows are fat when dried off and lose flesh during the dry period, their bodies may be depleted of essential nutrients at a time when they need them the most, at the time of calving and in the days that follow.

DHIA body condition score reports can help you monitor the energy status of cows at crucial stages of their life cycle and at various stages of their lactation. It can be a tremendous tool for monitoring the effectiveness of your feeding program, your heifer program and your dry cow program. Are the ketosis, DA and breeding problems you battle related to cows' body condition at time of calving, to changes in condition following calving, etc.? At what condition do cows stop showing heats and stop conceiving, and at what condition does conception start again? It might be very helpful to know this so you can anticipate impending problems and adjust your herd management program accordingly.

Penn State is an affirmative action equal opportunity university.

Direct Marketing Conference Set

LIVERPOOL, N.Y. — The program for the 31st annual New York State Direct Marketing Conference to be held at the Sheraton Inn Syracuse on January 18, 19 and 20, will help farm direct marketers manage their businesses with the focus on the customer.

Speakers from throughout New York and nearby states will talk about what they do to manage their operations, attract more customers, and keep them coming back.

Opening the conference on Tuesday, January 18 is Dave Eysen of Mapleside Farm Market in Brunswick, Ohio, south of Cleveland. Eysen's keynote presentation will discuss how this successful family business has been catering to customer interests and building a loyal clientele.

Mapleside Farm Market, originally an orchard, has expanded to include a year-round produce market, bakery, restaurant, and gift shop with special events held during the year. The shift to "entertainment farming," as Eysen calls it, has allowed Mapleside to attract a diverse and loyal customer base.

The results of two recent surveys will give marketers insight into what customers think and the challenges affecting farm markets. On Tuesday, Dr. Tim Rhodus, Ohio State University, will discuss the results of a survey of Ohio consumers' views on shopping at farm markets. On Wednesday, Jan. 19, Dr. Morris Fabian of Rutgers University will discuss the results of a study of

New Jersey farm markets that reveals the challenges foremost on the minds of marketers.

The balance of Tuesday's program features concurrent sessions on business performance measures, customer relations, merchandising strategies, convenience, advertising, food service, and computers. Wednesday's program includes topics on attracting tourists, competition, promotional events, business decision-making, zoning issues, brochures, gift baskets/mail order, and customer surveys. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, conference attendees are invited to informally network during the ice cream social and sharing session.

Thursday features three concurrent events: a small fruit program, a farmers' market managers program, and a tour to markets in Syracuse and Oneida County. The emphasis of the small fruit program is on extending the marketing season. Dr. Allan Sullivan, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, will present findings on a new strawberry production technique called waiting beds for season extension. Other topics on the small fruit program include day-neutral strawberry production, varieties, row covers, greenhouse

berry production, economics of post harvest handling, and storage.

The program for farmers' market managers and vendors on Thursday will highlight successful new markets started in 1993. Attendees will also learn about the importance of farmers' markets as a business incubator. Management, promotion, facilities, display, and regulations are other program topics of importance to vendors and manager at farmers' markets.

A new addition to the conference program is a market tour to supermarkets and produce stands in Syracuse and Oneida County, which will highlight produce handling facilities, in-store displays, making gift baskets, market layout, and operations. Pre-registration is required for the tour, limited to 45 participants.

The trade show, which operates from 8 a.m. Tuesday through 2 p.m. on Thursday, features 45 exhibitors with supplies and information for farm markets.

Conference registration forms and programs are available from county offices of Cornell cooperative extension or by contacting Cornell cooperative extension of Tompkins County (607) 272-2292.

**CLASSIFIED ADS
PAY OFF!**