

Spring Conference Provides Chance To Meet

Dave Slusser, General Manager

During the last three months, I have met hundreds of DHIA members, and particularly all of the employees of PA DHIA. It is really inspirational to know that we have so many friends and supporters on the farm, and in the Dairy Industry. DHIA is

Laptop Program Enters New Phase

PAT TORETTI

Pennsylvania DHIA's plan to put computers on the farm on test day is entering a new phase, according to Dean Amick, the PaDHIA's Field Services Director. "Out of 175 DHIA technicians, all but five have now been released. It's time to move to the next step: test day reporting." Late last year PaDHIA began a push to have all DHIA technicians sending paper barn sheet information to DHIA's central computer by the end of the spring. That goal has been met, and PaDHIA says its targets of reducing staff and improving turn around time have been hit. But new challenges lie ahead. "The transition to computers has been rough for some technicians," Amick admits, "but for the most part people have risen to the occasion. On any given day we now have about 90% of the information coming in on the telephone lines. A year ago when we said we'd be doing this, I'm not sure if we even believed it ourselves, but here we are."

The challenges that remain include improving the reliability of transmissions and the quality of support for technicians. "It's hard to believe in the 'information age' that you have so many phone companies with difficulty getting a connection to a remote computer," says Jim Boyer, processing center manager, "but there are a lot of mom-and-pop phone services out there, and moving the data can sometimes be a real chore. On the other hand, I guess you think about the exceptions more than the rule. We have difficulties with really only a handful of cases in more than a hundred transmissions per day. Still, it can be frustrating for the individuals involved, and they always seem to come from the same locations." Melissa Johnson and Dan Smith, who help technicians through the task of moving DHIA data from the farm, have noticed a change in the number and kind of calls now routinely coming in to the DHIA help desk. "Early on we got a lot of calls just in the nature of how to run the basic program. We don't see that so much anymore," says Smith, "now the questions are more along the lines of how can I leave such and such a list with the farmer, or how do I build a custom screen, or how to diagnose line problems or equipment repair."

Getting the technician help desk up to speed has required special effort, admits Smith, who handles troubleshooting for the ARIS system when not answering technician calls to the help center. "We have over two hundred ARIS users, but we've been putting them on the system one at a time for about seven years. And many

changing Nationally. Pennsylvania is of course involved with that change.

I have set a policy for myself to attend at least one County Committee or Board Meeting in every county per year. So far, I have attended 10 county meetings, most of which involved the field technicians. I give a report on the PA DHIA association, and

of them are feed dealers, or vets, or farmers who've already been using computers for a good while. Suddenly you add almost the same number of technicians, with computer skills all over the place, from very sophisticated to no familiarity at all. And they're more demanding, too. They have to get the barn sheet information in here before the samples arrive. It's been interesting, to say the least. We've learned a lot about computer support ourselves."

While the first phase of the laptop program involved a mandatory switch from paper to electronic barn sheets, the next step in the program will be somewhat more relaxed. In a deal recently concluded with Westfalia, PaDHIA will offer the Dairy Plan program to technicians interested in leaving reports on the farm on test day. PaDHIA will also be an authorized retailer for the program, so farmers interested in buying Dairy Plan or seeing how it might work in their own operation can talk to their DHIA technicians or call PaDHIA direct at 1-800-DHI-TEST. "In the first part of the program, we had a commitment to pay for the computer hardware by laying off people in the state office," notes Amick, "and as we were reducing keypunch operators we had no choice but to move aggressively in getting the technicians on board. Some of our people probably resented that, but we really had no choice: we're trying to reduce costs as much as we can. For the next step we're going to offer the testday reporting to technicians as a voluntary option. I expect a lot will be interested and we're going to concentrate on those who are."

In addition to providing test day reporting, PaDHIA plans to offer incentives to technicians to support and sell Dairy Plan to interested dairymen. "Not all the details have been worked out yet," says Amick, "but our plan is to provide a nice financial incentive to technicians who want to install Dairy Plan on a farmer's computer. We aren't asking our supervisors to be salespeople for Westfalia, but again, those who are interested will be encouraged to show our members what the program can do. And of course, there should be something in it for the technicians to do that."

PaDHIA plans to begin training the first group of technicians in the use of Dairy Plan for test day reporting at the next DHIA Tech Conference, scheduled for late July. At the same time DHIA will offer a new version of its electronic barn sheet program that works more closely with the Westfalia system. DHIA technicians interested in being involved in the project should plan to attend.

then we have a round table discussion. The county committee duties include evaluating and assisting the State Association in providing DHIA services. By all working together, we can do a much better job serving our members. If your county has not yet met with me, please let me know your meeting dates, and I will attend. Weekly I meet with Dean Amick, Dixie Burris, Jim Boyer and Jim Garrity. We discuss the comments and recommendations that come back from the county committee meetings. Many recommendations that

come from the counties have already been instituted, one being the color report forms.

The field service on Thursday, April 14 completed the Spring Technician Training Conferences. There were 14 conferences altogether of which I was able to attend 8 of them. After meeting so many of our field technicians, and working with them, I am more confident than ever about our future. These employees work where the rubber meets the road. They come into your farm every month, and provide a service second to none. They are PA

DHIA in your barn, and all the rest of us support them in their work. Because of the work they do and the management information PA DHIA provides, hundreds of PA DHIA members will be able to survive these troubled economic times. At each meeting, technicians shared their ideas on how to better serve our members. Another important accomplishment for our technicians has been the mastering of the laptop computer. Half of the conference time was spent working on their computer skills with

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Changes In DHIA Genetic Information

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substitute the Parent Average (PA) for an animal's PTA average. These procedures apply only to DHIA, DHI and AM/PM forms of testing (codes 00-39).

In those cases where the dam of an animal does not have a PTA and it is not possible to locate her parentage, there will be no PA available. This will prevent the system from calculating an accurate genetic value for the offspring.

Two circumstances exist that preclude an animal having a PTA. First, an animal calving for the first time less than 4 months prior to when USDA genetic evaluations (January and July) are published will not have a PTA value calculated. However, the Parent Average (PA) of such an animal can be substituted until she has a PTA of her own. Parent Average (PA) is simply the average of the PTA's of her sire and dam. In most cases it will be possible to locate PTA's for the parents of an animal. Sire PTA's are available from the USDA sire evaluation file. If the dam and daughter were both members of the same herd, recovery of the dam's PTA value should be relatively easy. This will allow the first calf heifer to have a PA. When it is averaged with the PTA of the sire of her calf it is possible to produce a reasonable estimate on the genetic value of the calf. The same situation exists when the PTA of the service sire is known and it can be coupled with the PA of the female to yield a genetic estimate (PA) on the calf she is carrying.

A second situation occurs when the sire (or service sire) of an animal is a young sire. This commonly

happens when a herd uses AI progeny test sires. While such young bulls don't have PTA's, they do not have PA's that can be used. When averaged with the female's PTA (or PA) the result is a reasonable genetic estimate on the offspring.

Using PAs as substitutes for missing PTA's will also allow better estimates of genetic merit for the several age groups shown in Genetic Profile section of the Herd Summary II report. Previously when the sire and/or dam no PTA, their genetic value was estimated as breed average

or zero. This grossly underestimated the genetic worth of the animals and their offspring.

Herd owners will be able to tell if PA's have been substituted for PTA's on the Individual Cow Page because the headings will indicate which value was used for an animal.

Use of Parent Averages in place of missing Predicted Transmitting Abilities will enhance the value of the genetic information that Pa DHIA provides on the Herd Summary II, the Individual Cow Page and on the calf and heifer reports.

Genetics progress with DHIA

How much genetic progress are we making in our Pennsylvania dairy herds? We can determine the year increases in pounds of milk, fat and protein by looking at the averages for

tested herds. However, such changes reflect a large contribution from better management as well as from improved genetics. Most estimates that I've seen indicate that 25- to 33 percent of the annual gain in production per cow can be attributed to genetics while the rest is due to better feeding and care as well as from better housing and other environmental circumstances.

By knowing the average Predicted Transmitting Ability (PTA) of the sires of cows we can estimate the genetic merit of the cows on test. We can't come up with a genetic value for cows not on test but my guess is that it would be somewhat lower than for the animals in tested herds. The genetics in a herd continuously change as the older cows (sired by bulls with lower PTA's) sires. PTA values for the 1990-1993 years inclusive are shown below:

The average annual increases in milk, fat and protein PTA's are 146 pounds for milk, 5 pounds for butterfat and 4.3 pounds for protein. Moreover the changes from year to year are rather consistent. Yearly production increases for the same time period were 470 pounds of milk, 16 pounds of fat and 15 pound protein. Dividing the yearly PTA increases by the yearly production increases gives us estimates of the genetic contribution of 31%, 31% and 29% for milk, fat and protein.

Sire PTA (LBS.)	1990	1991	1992	1993
Milk	+366	+513	+655	+805
Fat	+14	+20	+25	+29
Protein	+10	+15	+19	+23