

National DHIA Rules To Change

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The legal issues waste resources which should be helping all members get affordable services.

The effect wanted for the DHIA segment of the dairy industry is to minimize its role as referee between other segments of the dairy cattle industry.

In more general terms, the concept would hold that if a man buys a Holstein with a DHIA record of high production, and the seller used unreported artificial or illegal means to create that record, then DHIA shouldn't be held liable for that deceit, nor for the buyer's failure to use good sense in making a purchase.

Another goal of changing rules would be to allow more producer involvement in testing, so that there could be a more affordable range of services available to members.

More and more, according to industry experts, producers want testing procedures and costs that reflect herd management needs, not just those designed to establish

high production of a cow or herd for genetic-market attention.

The reason for all of this, according to Dukas, is not only the historically high costs associated with DHIA serving as "judge and jury," but because of significant changes within the dairy production industry that, essentially, make it difficult and more costly to make sure everyone is acting ethically.

The bottom line is that those who want to use DHIA information for purposes other than herd management — such as for tracking production of sire daughters — will be able to accept a wider variety of testing programs while being able to examine more closely the conditions under which data were recorded.

Dukas said that, if everything can come together properly, the new rules would, "Allow the user to have more information to understand what is going on at a farm, rather than for us to make that judgement."

The current use of recombinant

bovine somatotropin, which is not necessarily reported, but has a significant impact on dairy production, and other methods for increasing milk production, which may or may not be illegal, as well as variations in cow identification procedures, and a broad spectrum of dietary management, all combine to thwart the efforts of a DHIA to collect and report accurate, comparable data.

The savings to dairy producer members of DHIA could be significant, for these and other reasons.

"Today, if on a young sire program, you need to be on an official (DHIA) program," Dukas said. This means that a technician would have to supervise testing, and 12 tests per year are required. "Under the concept (for changing rules), we will identify how many observations were supervised. With further research, the A.I. industry may find that you don't need 12 tests to prove sires."

"With that in mind, you can see how many new forms of testing

(would be possible), where the farmer could take the tests on unsupervised days for his own records, and, if the only need for off-farm use (of the supervised tests) would be for (eligibility in) a young sire program, (the farmer) may be able to test with a technician fewer times."

Fewer supervised tests means less cost to the farmer.

While this may mean that an individual farmer may see a technician less often, it doesn't necessarily mean that the need for technicians will diminish.

"With this kind (of testing program), technicians will have different schedules than today, but less work? I don't see that happening," Dukas said.

"There may be many herds that may want to participate that aren't herd members today," he said.

Despite the recent spate of competition between individual DHIA's throughout the country, there are basically two types of current tests — those that are official, and require strong technician supervision, or those that are unofficial and do not require such technician supervision.

Those programs requiring more services of a technician are naturally higher in cost to the producer, and a reason why some producers — who could otherwise use the breeding information, the somatic cell count information, the protein and fat composition monitoring for nutrition work and herd health — don't bother joining a DHIA, reserving that cash flow for other aspects of the farm or family.

And, years ago, some DHIA's didn't reduce costs significantly for technician-limited programs (such as AM/PM), but in reality overcharged in order to support the higher-costing classic program of having a technician supervise testing at two milkings on the same day.

Now, with more accurate formulas for converting production values of morning and evening milkings, better accuracy in tradi-

tional testing devices and new devices, laptop computers in the barn, home computers and direct computer links to records processing centers, etc., a change in rules may make it more feasible for all herds to use some offerings from DHIA's.

As far as the need for technicians, Dukas said he can't imagine that it would diminish with new rules changes.

Technicians across the nation must be competent with a laptop computer, they must be able to perform and understand more than ever. That, along with the fact that research has shown that a technician can make a better living with a full schedule of limited-supervised tests as opposed to the traditional tests, and the anticipated increase in dairy herd participation that should accompany less-costly and less-involved testing options, he said he doesn't expect any significant job losses.

But, at the same time, Dukas said that the objective of National DHIA is not to create jobs, but to provide services to members at the lowest cost possible.

"Our mission is really to serve members; not maintain labs, not to maintain status quo," he said.

The change in rules is almost certain to come, he said. Changes in records standards formats have already been implemented at processing centers across the nation, Dukas said, although the farmer doesn't see it yet.

He also said that the USDA AIPL, which does the genetic evaluations for the national herd, is currently programming to accommodate the DHIA changes.

As for the rest of the industry, Dukas said, "We predict the industry will start to make the decisions on how they use records in 1995."

Internationally, the rules changes apparently will not cause a problem, Dukas said.

Expectations from some are that Thursday's Senate approval of the General Agreement on Tariffs and

Trade (GATT) will herald a less-fettered world-wide marketplace. With respect to that, the impact of changing rules governing data collection for comparison of animal performance has been considered by National DHIA.

According to Dukas, the concept of changing rules in the United States has already been presented during an international DHIA meeting, Dukas said, adding that it was well received. In fact, he said that the head of INTERBULL, the international center of genetic conversions located in Sweden, had said that just this sort of change should come about in the United States.

As far as working out the details, the National DHIA Leaders Conference (set for mid-January in Orlando, Fla.) is set to deal with the rules issues.

From there, revised rules proposals, and also a revised foundation for enforcement, are to go before DHIA delegates in late March during the 1995 National Convention and Trade Show, in Burlington, Vt.

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