

Several Ways To Increase Dairy Profit

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NEWARK, Del. — As dairy producers, our primary concern is getting the right milk price every month, yet we have so little control over it.

We need an organized effort to increase local consumption of milk, yogurt, ice cream and cheeses.

If we can get more people to eat more pizza more often, that will increase the consumption of mozzarella cheese. Why? Because our milk price at the farm gate is driven by how much cheese is sold in Wisconsin every month.

One thing we do have control over at our farms is the cost of producing milk and the reproductive cost of our milking animals which is, next to feed, the major expense.

By reproductive cost, we mean that if most of our cows were in the early months of lactation, we would have nothing but peak yield production and peak efficiency.

But since admittedly we don't yet know how to keep all cows in peak production at all times, we have to suffer the financial consequences of less and less milk production as cows come to the end of their lactations.

Yet it makes a huge difference financially whether we are skilled enough to have only a few cows or many in late lactation.

This skill we can sharpen daily by looking at our herd records, especially our DHIA records on each cow and for the whole herd.

Ask yourself: What is the reproductive status of my herd today?

Not being able to detect cows

in heat is probably the biggest obstacle to lowering reproductive costs. Missing half the cows in first heat after calving, because of their silent estrus or other reasons, will translate into an eventual conception rate of no greater than a costly 60 percent, even when insemination takes place by 51 days after calving and everything else works perfectly.

Heat detection accuracy on many of our farms is only 50 percent, and many farms do not yet breed all their cows back after calving by 51 days.

At least eight parameters have a bearing on how well we can reduce reproductive costs. The first is the "length of dry period"; a dry period shorter or longer than 60 days costs money.

A short dry period does not provide enough time for mammary regeneration and results in less milk yield in the next lactation. A long dry period costs in feed money without milk income; it also often causes fat cows with many health problems after the next calving. Our research has shown that each day over 60 days costs an average of \$3 per cow per day; and each day under 60 days costs \$2 per cow per day.

The second parameter is "days open." Your goal should be no more than 90 days open after calving. Any excess days are costly.

If your herd right now averages 120 days open, as many of our dairy farms do, that means that a 100-cow herd will lose \$9,000 per year, based on the cost of \$3 per cow per day above 90 days open. Many things are responsible for longer days open—heat detection accuracy, of course, but also semen quality, breeding tech-

nique, nutrition during peak production, diseases, the weather and skilled labor.

The third parameter in checking cow and herd records is "services per conception." The number of services are directly related to conception rate.

Conception rate influences days open, because every missed heat period adds 21 days to days open. The goal per herd should be no more than 1.5 services per conception. If the average is 2.0 services, this 0.5 fraction will translate into an additional cost per cow per year of \$7.50. At 1.5 services per conception, the average conception rate would be about only 64 percent.

Fourth, but in my opinion the biggest problem, is "heat detection accuracy." At \$3 cost for each day open above 90 days, the financial loss for each extra missed heat period of 21 days would be \$63 per cow per year.

Fifth is "days at first breeding" after calving. With good heat detection and with proper feeding at peak production, the first estrus should show at 30-50 days after calving. This means that good herd management should lead to first breeding after calving at the second heat, or 51-71 days in milk after calving.

The sixth parameter is "breeding interval," which is also related to how well heat is detected, especially after first breeding. A herd average should be no greater than 25-30 days, but if a heat is missed, the average breeding

interval increases to a costly average of 41 days.

Seventh is "calving interval" between two consecutive calvings. It's affected by days open and pregnancy length.

Calving interval, which is a sharp indicator of historical performance in my herd, should be between 12 and 13 months per cow per year. If a herd instead averages 13.3 months, the financial loss for that herd would be \$14.62 per cow per year; at 14 months, it would be \$57.54 and at 14.3 months, it would cost \$88.92 per cow per year extra.

Research has also shown from a study of 795 herds on DHIA with 121,773 cows that herds with a calving average of 12.7 months had average milk production per cow per year of 18,330 pounds, while herds with 13.7 months had 17,864 pounds and herds with 15 months had only 15,991 pounds, a considerable production and financial loss due to long calving intervals.

The eighth parameter, "days in milk," which is closely related to length of dry period, is probably the quickest and best daily indicator of how skilled reproductive

costs in a herd are managed.

An annual average should be no more than half the usual 305-day lactation length, for example, 150 days. Averages around 200 days in milk indicate severe heat detection and conception rate problems, unless a herd is deliberately on a longer than 305-day lactation length maybe for embryo transfers or other special management decisions.

All these parameters are meaningful only if daily records on each cow are kept either with DHIA or another computerized milk and feed recording system.

We used to do it by hand before the computer age, but now with larger herds, the computer—the PC on my desk or the big one at DHIA—is making the job so much easier, faster, more comprehensive and more detailed. I don't know how so many of our herd owners can survive economically much longer without a computer.

Personally, I'm not a computer devotee, but computers do a lot of work for me, like a slave, which makes my management effective and more profitable even at lower market prices.

Commercial Goat Milk

Production To Be Discussed

NEW HOLLAND goat cheese processor.
(Lancaster Co.—An opportunity exists for goat owners to produce milk commercially for a local discuss the commercial

production of goat milk. The meeting will be held in New Holland at the Diffenbach Auction Barns located along Jackson Street, south of the sales stable.

Topics to be discussed include:

- "The Goat Cheese Market" Alan Toby, Fleur De Lait Foods, Ins., New Holland.

- "Budgeting Dairy Goat Income and Expenses" Glenn Shirk, Extension Agent, Lancaster

- "Producing Goat Milk Commercially—Our Experiences" Rick and Denise Goss, Red Oak Farm, Palmyra

- "Getting Started in the Commercial Goat Milk Producing Business" panel consisting of Rick and Denise Goss, Lynn Sammons of the Willow Creek Animal Hospital, Reading and Jacob Fisher, Windy Hill Goat Dairy Manheim.

Anyone who is interested in the commercial production of goat milk is invited. There will be plenty of opportunity for question and for suggestions and to discuss topics to be addressed at future meetings.

This educational meeting is being conducted by Penn State Cooperative Extension in cooperation with the Lancaster County Dairy Goat Club, the Eastern Lancaster County School District, and Fleur De Lait Foods, Inc.

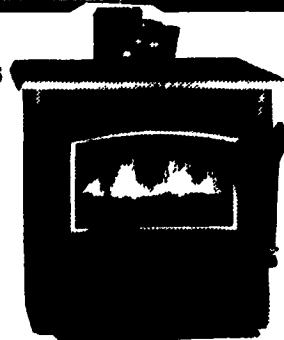
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