

Tioga County Dairy Day Topics Focus On Dry Cow, Heifer Management

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that knowledge is meant to be shared.

Highlighting changing technologies was Pennsylvania DHIA marketing manager Tom Smith who touched on just a few technologies that will get the information to you faster and more efficiently through the use of computers.

Penn State Dairy Specialist Jud Heinrichs examined the bottom line in heifer growing when questioned breeders about average age of calving and the heifer feeding programs.

"There are two things I look at," said Heinrichs. "What is the age at calving and how big is she when she calves?"

He noted that the average age of calving has steadily declined. In a 1991 report, Holstein heifers were close to 24 months on average and Jersey heifers were close to 22 months on average.

Heinrichs also stated that the size of the heifer at first calving has a tremendous impact on total production during her first lactation.

"If she comes in small, she will grow a lot during the first lactation," he said.

In one study, Heinrichs showed that increasing the body weight of a Holstein by 100 pounds at first calving will increase milk production by 475 pounds in her first lactation.

"Ten years ago as the average age of first calving was around 27 months, people got more milk in

the first lactation. Therefore the old adage was born that older heifers make more milk. I content that the older heifers were probably the larger heifers," he said. "From 1994 data we see that heifers calved at 23 months made as much milk as those calved at 28 months. Now people are seeing earlier calving heifers make as much milk as later calving heifers. That tells me that heifers are getting larger at an earlier age." Knowing how large those heifers are is also important.

"I found a lot of people could decrease the age of calving by taping the heifers and finding out exactly what they weigh. The problem with the tapes is that there is bad data from old research. If you take the time to use the weight tape, make sure the data is up to date."

To get those larger heifers, Heinrichs notes that forage testing for heifers is critical.

"Forage testing and feed programming are fundamentally important," said Heinrichs.

He emphasized his point by saying that 80 to 90 percent of a heifer's dry matter intake comes from forages. If you don't test the forage, it is essentially an unknown source of nutrients.

"When you say heifer hay, people laugh. Everyone knows what it is. You've got to feed it to someone. You can't feed it to your cows, they won't milk. Hopefully you'll only feed it to your yearling heifers. But you've got to know if

it's five percent or eight or ten percent protein," said Heinrichs.

The younger calves and heifers, from three to six months, need good hay.

"Minerals are especially important as well as protein with the calves and heifers. They're laying a lot of bone structure down," Heinrichs said. "After six months they slow down in growth, the rumen is larger, so they can handle more dry matter. Also the nutrients can be less (dense) because they're consuming more dry matter."

Heinrichs also touched on the different by product feeds available, including milk replacer, and the availability of ionophores such as Rumensin or Bovatec.

"What ionophores do is change the functionality in the rumen and make it more efficient. It changes the acetic to propionic acid ratio, the animals lose less methane and make more energy. They also inhibit ammonia production," said Heinrichs.

Environment can also have a major impact on growth rate in heifers. Included in this is the feed bunk space and repair, the numbers of animals and the age spread in the group, the water availability, and the time feed is available.

Changing his focus to calf nutrition from birth to weaning, Heinrichs noted that it is important to get the rumen functioning as soon as possible.

He recommends offering a palatable grain mix to the calves as early as possible and offering free

choice water.

"Calves can easily be weaned at four to six weeks. Not every calf every day," Heinrichs said, "but most can. At that time they're eating 1.5 to two pounds minimum grain per day."

Heinrichs backed up his point with a study that showed that no matter what the age of weaning between three and eight weeks, the calf's growth jumped tremendously at weaning and basically evened out.

"We got the rumen going faster and ended up with the same output. There's really no logic in waiting. The longer you wait to wean, the longer you slow down rumen development," said Heinrichs.

Tying into the nutrition discussion was Penn State Graduate student Dana Putman. He focused primarily on feeding the dry cow to move them into the milking string without any problems.

"There's probably no period in a cow's life cycle where there are more challenges than pre-calving," said Putman.

This period presents a challenge because the cow's nutritional needs are high, but it's difficult to get her to eat enough. Therefore, you have a cow that's prone to disease.

"There is a lot of research focused on the transition period. We're now seeing that the more milk produced on day one of her lactation, the more milk she will produce during the entire lactation," Putman noted.

He contended that most farms could do a better job with the transition cows with very little addition-

al investment.

"You need a good sense of what the animals are," said Putman.

The basic information needed is the body weight and body condition of the cow, her dry matter intake, a forage and feed analysis, and a feed management strategy.

He suggested breaking the dry cows into distinct groups, an early group at -60 to -22 days; a close-up group at -21 to 0 days, and a fresh cow group from 0 to 14 days.

His recommendations for feeding early dry cows included no more than 50 percent corn silage, no more than 30 percent legume forage, feeding five to 10 pounds of long forage, and three to five pounds of grain.

For the close-up cow he recommends increasing the grain to six to eight pounds per day and feeding the forage and grain from the milking cow ration. He stresses, however that you must watch the potassium and calcium levels and you should keep protein between 12 and 16 percent of dry matter intake.

After calving, Putman recommends maximizing dry matter intake, increasing grain to eight to 12 pounds per day gradually, feeding five to eight pounds of long hay and putting them on the milking cow diet.

Knowing the body weight will determine the nutrient requirements of the animal.

"The (body weight) must be measured. It's difficult to do, especially with a pregnant cow. Body weight varies tremendously. The body condition score is probably

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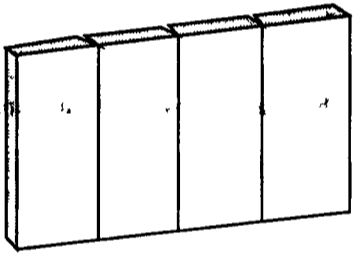
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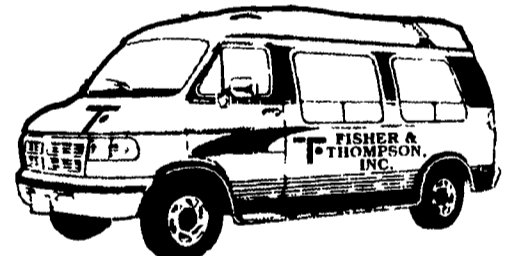
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"It was very enjoyable to see and experience other dairy farms. There were several particular ideas that we could bring home and use. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves."

Richard Rohrer

"The trip to New York was a good time and very informative. I saw a lot of large dairies in just a couple of days without being rushed around. It was a well-planned trip for anyone who is looking to expand his operation."

Andrew Laffey - Glennville Farm

TOUR SCHEDULE:

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH

Leave Lancaster Shopping Center 5:45 a.m.

- We travel to Midwestern New York and visit two (2) dairies and later meet another group of dairymen from Minnesota & Wisconsin.
- Dinner & lodging in the Batavia, NY area.
- Producer meeting hosted by Rolf Reisgies, president of Germania. Topic "The Lowest Cost of Any Parlor."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH

- Visit 3-4 more dairies & return to Lancaster at approximately 9:00 p.m.

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