

Music May Be Melodious To Cow, Worker Performance

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Overall, Matt continues to improve the genetics on the herd — his favorite part of the enterprise. He learned in Penn State to differentiate between what he calls "maximization and optimization." He said that when producers go for maximization of their operation, they are going for the "fullest level of production" and to use whatever feeding and caring methods are necessary.

However, Matt believes he is working to "optimize" the herd — find a happy medium — to run the operation himself, not let the cows run the business. The key to optimization is to simplify the work and to maximize the time at the job.

Also, Matt noted that he has other interests and responsibilities off the farm. He serves as Lancaster County Dairy 4-H leader, is a member of the Grange, and serves on the 4-H, fair board, and on an ag fraternity.

While working to improve the genetics, Matt said that he has learned to artificially inseminate (AI) the cows. In college, cows not in heat were used, which proved very difficult for Matt. But he was able to borrow a semen tank from a commercial service in which a friend gave him some assistance and believes he is making great strides in using AI and choosing the right types of bulls for the herd.

Matt believes, for the long-term, that good genetics are critical. It doesn't matter how good the feeding program may be — "without good genetics, it doesn't matter how good the feed is," he said.

Right now there are no plans to upgrade the stereo system, however.

If the Espenshades decide to someday construct a double-4 herringbone milking parlor, Matt indicated, "we'll put in surround sound — maybe."

Daview Farm

There's no question about what type of music Luther and Teresa Davis, of Daview Farm near Kutztown, enjoy playing for their herd.

"We believe that the music a lot of the time is for our preference," Teresa told *Lancaster Farming*.

That music includes WOGL FM, which plays "the oldies." Their daughter, Erica, recently crowned Berks County dairy princess, enjoys having the cows listen to WIOV FM, a country station broadcast from Ephrata.

The Davis family care for about 70 milking cows, a Holstein registered herd, on their farm. Playing music is another way the Davis family helps cows get comfortable.

The emphasis on cow comfort has paid off, too. The recent DHIA report shows they achieved a rolling herd average of 23,928 pounds of milk, with 851 pounds of fat and 793 pounds of protein.

But the music didn't work alone. Teresa indicated that "cows and people work well when the cows are comfortable." Let's face it: milking twice a day can get pretty boring after a while, Teresa noted.

The important thing is that making use of oldies music, country western, or classic rock goes hand in hand with other cow comfort practices. On the 155-acre Daview Farm, those practices include using a rubber mat underneath the stall in addition to sawdust on top of the mat.

Teresa noted that the old rubber mats aren't as comfortable as the new rubber-filled mattresses. But when the cows are lying down comfortably, milk is being made.

Another equation working into the cow comfort factor is the use of a TMR. "A TMR is beneficial in a lot of different ways," said Teresa. "It benefits the cows and saves on feed." Using a TMR gives dairy managers a way to control feed use and save on costs.

Comfortable cows mean gentler, more cooperative animals. Gentle cows create better temperament in the stall or parlor, making them easier to milk.

Another ingredient in the cow comfort factor is the use of a recently installed tunnel ventilation system in the barn. The tunnel system makes use of five large fans at one end and air vents at the other end. Air moves at about seven miles per hour through the barn. On hot days, the ventilation provides a reliable way for the cows to cool off.

Teresa remembers that one night a couple of summers ago a cow stuck her head out the door at night. It was still so hot and humid outside that the cow decided to stay inside where it was cool and ventilated.

Daview Farm sells their milk to Clover Farms. Teresa farms with husband, Luther, and children Erica, 17; Gregory, 14; Aaron, 8; and Jillian, 4.

Piwowar Farm

Like Matt Espenshade, John S. Piwowar III, who manages a dairy operation in Uniontown, knows how important music is to the cow's comfort factor.

When music plays, the "cows are not jittery," he said.

But a lot of what the 90-cow herd listens to is classic rock. The herd also listens to country from WASP FM, a station near Pittsburgh.

Piwowar has tried various types of music — except rap. With rap music, "I don't know how the cows would react," he said. "But it would make life unbearable for me."

Few universities have done in-depth studies into the effect that using music while milking may have, directly, on cow production.

Piwowar manages about 90 cows milking, in addition to 70 head of replacement stock. The herd includes mostly grade Holsteins with about 20 registered Jerseys. Years ago they quit using state DHIA and went to their own milk test.

The herd average is about

21,000 pounds with a test of 3.3 percent protein and 4.1 percent fat, according to Piwowar. The farm milks from a double-4 herringbone parlor. The family is a member of Mid-America Dairying.

Altogether the Piwowars manage 350 acres just outside Uniontown, including rented acreage. They grow a lot of corn and other feeds for the farm. They haven't been sold on intensive grazing yet, according to Piwowar.

The music is also used to calm some of the hired help. But the music is valuable to the cows to keep them from becoming startled, nervous, and edgy to milk from sudden movements or noises. In a sense, the music drowns out background distractions that could interfere with a good milking session.

Piwowar also likes to listen to National Public Radio. That way he can glean news while milking. But he admitted to having no "favorite" type of music — he sometimes plays classical music and whatever appeals to him.

Not too long ago Piwowar gave up on cable TV and now spends the

money on an Internet connection. Instead of watching TV, he'll spend an hour a day on the Internet — chatting with fellow Vietnam veterans throughout the country.

Like providing music as part of cow and worker comfort, Piwowar emphasized the workplace and the environment at the farm.

He also emphasized the importance of having relief milkers to ease the burden of work for farm members.

"Life doesn't begin and end on the farm," he said. "You have to have a life otherwise."

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