

# Dairy Management Column

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## Dairy Farmers and the Internet

I used to answer questions that came into my office by phone and mail with information from my own files and from books and journals. Now, the electronics age has crept up on me, rendering obsolete many of the tools I used to use.

Who still uses a slide rule? Or a desk calculator with a big keyboard and a noisy carriage? Or an IBM typewriter with its revolving letter font? Today we couldn't give away these one essential and expensive pieces of equipment. Instead, we carry pocket calculators and portable computers, which do all the chores of those tools and much more, much faster. It's like changing from riding a bicycle to driving a Lincoln Towncar. Learning to handle the bicycle was easy, but these new electronic things! It takes a lot of IQ and more than a little patience. But we cannot go back to the bicycle; we must move forward to keep up with the more competitive world.

In addition to my old-fashioned address and phone number, I now have a fax number, an e-mail address and a Worldwide Web address. Who knows what's

next? Whether I like it or not, "traffic" is coming in on these new addresses and I have to respond. A few years ago we changed the Delaware DHIA over to an electronic system. So far, the transfer to computers has gone smoothly, and it is so much faster for input and turnaround results. We no longer mail papers; the only sending we do now is shipping samples. With electronic milk meters in the milking parlor, milk-per-cow-day data on the UD dairy herd can be transferred monthly without a technician or tester. And it's legal and tamper-proof. We need a tester only four times a year for sample taking. Soon that too may become electronic.

Yet only a minority of DHIA herd producers have desk computers. I'm surprised at the slow pace of adoption. It reminds me of the changeover years ago from cooling and shipping milk in cans to installing a cooling tank at the farm and shipping by tank truck. Many farmers were slow in seeing the advantages of that advancement, but today there are few can-shippers left.

So, did you get a computer this Christmas, or are you in the market for one in the New Year? I can't wait to see all our dairy farmers with computers. The options are many, depending on

the capacity of the computer memory. A typical desk computer will cost between \$1,500 and \$5,000; the convenient, but more sensitive, portables about 50 percent more. Our DHIA testers take portables into the milking parlor for recording of data directly; however, this has necessitated more repair, because computers and cow environments in the parlor or barn do not mix well.

There is a new language associated with computers. People who talk about computers often sound as if they are from another planet. A desktop computer is a "PC," a portable is a "laptop," and both are "hardware." Programs that run on computers are "software." Don't asked me why traditional English is not good enough. Most computers operate using a "mouse," a device that moves the "cursor" across the computer screen.

The word processing function of my computer has replaced my typewriter. It's faster, and it makes storing, sorting and editing much easier. Spreadsheet software has replaced the old columnar pads, making financial bookkeeping, multiple data records, statistical analyses and graphic displays simpler. I used to keep a 3-ring binder with me

that contained single pages for each cow and calf and their continuous health, reproduction and production history. A laptop does this much better. And when I connect the computer to the phone using a modem, I can get data from the DHIA computing center.

I now use the computer to send information instead of mailing it. With the Internet and the World Wide Web, I can search for information, even from technical journals that is otherwise accessible only visiting a university library. A modem, preferably one with high speed, is needed for this as well as a lot of computer memory capacity. For me, e-mail is no friend, yet it has become a necessity. So many people are using it, it may replace traditional mail. World Wide Web and e-mail are part of Internet, which is a worldwide connection of computers, that allows you to get information on virtually any topic from around the world.

The Internet even provides bulletin boards called Listserv, where people can read and reply to messages. For dairy farmers, consultants, veterinarians and processors, Dairy-L is popular and used by more than 3,000 people from 40 countries.


"Browsing" is the term

applied to searching the World Wide Web, via a "search engine," such as Yahoo, Lycos and Web Crawler. This allows users to access documents and texts from around the world, including home pages of organizations. Home page is like a catalog of the many departments, personnel and products of an organization as big as a university or as small as a dairy farm.


For example, if you want to find information about mastitis in goats, select a search engine and the topic "mastitis." The search will yield many, maybe thousands, of "hits," which then have to be narrowed down by adding the subordinate topic "goat" or any other species.

"Bookmark" is a term for going directly to a frequently used web address or "site." There are many web sites related to the dairy industry, university extension and research, expert consultants, weather channel, feed prices, dairy markets for milk, cheese, butter, non-fat dried milk, future prices for milk and grain. Even magazines such as "Hoard's Dairyman," "Dairy Herd Management" and "Dairy Today" have web sites, which have articles from current and

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