

## Pennsylvania DHIA Heifer '98 Program Released

**PATRICIA TORETTI**

STATE COLLEGE, PA - Spring has been a busy season for the programming staff at Pennsylvania DHIA if the frantic activity underway in the PA DHIA processing center in recent days are any indication. I got a chance to speak to Jim Boyer, Pennsylvania DHIA's processing center manager for a few minutes amid the general chaos as his staff prepares to release PA DHIA's long awaited Heifer '98 farm management program for the Microsoft Windows operating system.

"We're extremely excited about this one," Boyer says as he leans back in the clutter of his small office outside State College, "not just because of the program itself - which is one of the most impressive pieces we've put together in the time that I've been here - but more because of all the different programs and new software technology that are finally coming together. And the kinds of products that will be following along just this one rolls out the door. In the offing are a Lab Analyst program targeted at agribusiness consultants, a Windows '95 based overhaul of the DHIA technicians' barnsheet, and a farm management program that will be the jewel in the crown.

"It's not that I want to steal any thunder from the Heifer '98 program," Boyer says. "But we really have engineered this one to inter-operate with a complete software system. I think in terms of the kinds of programs that are presently available to farm managers and ag consultants we've made an effort to insure that the new suite of programs we're offering this year will be different both philosophically and operationally than anything that's been offered in the DHIA arena in the past."

"First, our price point will be different. You look at the offerings from other DHIA centers and it's clear that they're primarily designated to guarantee a steady revenue stream into the central processing location, and guarantee a continual flow of records there, too. That's not our outlook, and frankly, it's not the outlook of anybody in the serious software business anymore. It's just old thinking. We will not charge \$20 or \$30 or \$40 per month - month after month - forever. Our software will be sold according to the accepted practice: a one time fee to buy the license. Period. We will charge for upgrades, but if people don't want to buy a new version, they won't have to. That's the standard practice in the software industry. And our software will be affordable - we will charge \$29 (one time) to a PA DHIA member, and \$49 (one time) to a non-member for Heifer '98. There will not be any hidden costs, and there will not be any monthly licensing fees, per cow fees, or requirements that they must use our processing.

"Second, our intention is that our system will be open, both to the consumer and the developer. Neither our heifer program nor our new lab program

(labAnalyst) will have a requirement that you even need to be on DHIA test at all in order to use them. Certainly we will offer steep discounts to members of PA DHIA, and certainly you will be able to benefit from information technology much more if you are on test with DHIA. But the software is not geared toward keeping a captive audience using our processing center.

"When I say that the software will be open to the developer, I mean that, too. All of our components will use industry standard databases instead of proprietary implementations. And all of our databases will be documented so that if a dairyman or his wife or children have some experience using the industry standard database software such as Microsoft Access or Corel Paradox, they will also be able to customize this program to whatever level their skill allows. We will document how to do that, and we will support people who want to do that kind of thing. I challenge anybody to produce a software program in the DHIA system right now that allows you to actually take the fields out of a DHIA report and plunk them down into a spreadsheet or a word processor, as is. They simply aren't designed to function with anyone else's software, and they really aren't designed to allow you to do any amount of tailoring - especially outside of the vendor's program itself. Getting data out in more than a couple of pretty standard ways is like pulling teeth. Compared to the ease of integration or data movement of Windows '95 programs, what DHIA farm programs have offered in the past are a joke."

"Third, our programs for farm management will be a suite, and while the package will be well integrated and there will be some advantages to buying the whole thing, you won't have to if you're only raising heifers, then just buy the heifer program. If all you want is some MUN or SCC analysis in addition to the raw numbers that come back from your lab, then you can buy the labAnalyst module, and nothing else."

Deflecting Boyer from the **Big Picture** is difficult, but eventually I nail him down on some specifics of what Heifer '98 will offer. It will have features that replace the existing Heifer Management Program that DHIA has run on paper for about 10 years. These include: user defined health, repro, and status codes, events, action reports, stocks inventory reports sorted on a variety of criteria, growth and anticipated freshening data and genetic summaries. In addition the new program will offer the ability to produce reports, charts and graphs on the fly, and will have a number of powerful data entry features that make repetitive keypunching simpler and less error-prone. "Our target user for data entry was a DHIA technician slaving over a keyboard with 35-45 herds. If we can make life a little easier for that group, it should make data entry much more tol-

erable for those who only have one herd to deal with." Does that mean PA DHIA's technicians will carry the new program? "Absolutely," Boyer responds. "Every one. If a farmer decides to have a DHIA technician run the program for him on his behalf instead of buying it and operating it on his own, that's a benefit of DHIA membership."

### Employees' Summer Conference

**SCOTT WILLIAMS**  
Training Coordinator

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) - During a recent PA DHIA field staff meeting plans for the Annual Employees' Summer Conference were finalized. The agenda is packed with interesting information for both field technicians and office staff as well as an awards ceremony to recognize our outstanding employees for 1998. This year's conference will emphasize our new heifer program and the upcoming cow module. David Bigelow, our new marketing

manager, will present some of his ideas for improving customer service and technicians skills. Another speaker will enlighten everyone on ways to handle stress not only on the job but also in everyday life.

The summer conference is a fun and educational time for technicians and employees. We try to encourage all employees to attend so they can partake in the fun and fellowship with technicians from all parts of the state. This year the conference will be held in Grantville, Pennsylvania at the end of June.

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### Marketing and Customer Service Takes Priority

**DAVID BIGELOW**  
Marketing Manager

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) - An aggressive marketing program has been launched and is proving to be highly successful judging by the amount of new herds that are being enrolled throughout the PA DHIA service area. With the availability of a newly priced USDA approved Owner Sampler program as well as the customary 2X and AM/PM programs, new member

enlistment has increased at a near record pace.

Recently at the spring technician's conferences, emphasis was placed on excellent customer service. PA DHIA technicians remain committed to providing top notch service to their dairymen. These services include same-day test reports, tagged calves, updating calf books, and reporting any other pertinent information. PA DHIA technicians will be servicing and providing herd management information in a more aggressive manner in the future.

### Fine Tuning With MUN Testing

**DAVID BIGELOW**  
Marketing Manager

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) - Reproductive health and the balance of the ration are two of the most affected areas when the milk urea nitrogen averages fall out of the recommended criteria. Are your average days to first service below 75 days? Keep in mind, days open over 100 days costs the dairyman anywhere from 1 to 3 dollars a day per animal. Does your calving interval fall between the range of 12.5 to 12.8 months? Is your first service conception rate 50% or greater? Improvement of estrous detection from 40 to 50% at 50% conception means a net profit of \$34.00/cow/year and a 50 to 60% estrous detection at 50% conception means a net profit of \$22.00/cow/year. Are you culling more than 25% of total animals culled due to reproduction? If so, the milk urea nitrogen test from PA DHIA may be able to assist you with your total dairy herd management.

Feel free to contact Dean Amick at 800-344-8378 if you have any questions or would like a representative to stop by your farm to explain your records or begin a testing program.

Do you really feel that your herd management needs are being met satisfactorily through another DHIA organization? PA DHIA has an industry best of 83% usable records being used for genetic evaluations by the USDA. This greatly affects the young sire programs and the ability to merchandise cattle both domestically and worldwide. PA DHIA members own a full service DHIA that includes field, processing, and laboratory services which is extremely helpful in making quick adjustments within each program. By utilizing the PA DHIA somatic cell report a dairyman can drop one SCC Code (4 to 3) and increase profits by \$2,400.00 per year based on 50 cows and \$12.00 cwt. milk price. Reducing the calving interval from 14 to 13 months increases profits by \$4,500.00. Reducing breeding services per cow from 2.2 to 1.7 will save \$250.00 per year in semen cost alone using \$10.00 per unit semen.

PA DHIA provides the most up-to-date and accurate dairy management programs in the country. Please feel free to contact the PA DHIA office at 800-344-8378 if we can assist you with the interpretation of your records or if you would like to enroll in our testing programs.

gram, or to register calves electronically using "sketchless" ID options from both the Jersey and Holstein registry associations. In addition, the new program has the ability to record and catalog calves by digital picture identification.

"Pictures?" I ask, a little surprised. "You mean like with a digital camera?"

"Yes, pictures." He replies, "this seems to be the thing that grabs everybody, when we take the program out to shows, and so on. The timing between this and the advent of digital cameras has led a lot of other folks to ask your very question. But really there are at least three different ways you would be able to use this program with photographic images. Digital cameras, of course. Or just a good old 35 mm camera with a color scanner that you can buy for \$150 or less. A third option take the pictures from a 35 mm roll of film and have your developer put the images on diskette instead of paper or slides. In fact the last option is the one I would recommend as being cost effective for most people. With the latest Kodak 800 speed 'Max' film you can take pictures of young animals in lower light conditions than is possible with a digital camera. Digital photography is coming, and it is convenient, but I'd say the mainstream cost and quality are still a good two years away."

Boyer also notes that the program will be fully Internet capable, making it possible for a dairyman to upload backups of his calves and even in-house generated reports, graphs, and (of course) pictures, if he so desires. He will also be able to specify that he wants 'prettier' versions of the printed reports available for sale, display, or other marketing purposes simply by making an online request that the report or barncard be printed in State College. "Actually, although PA DHIA was the first to see the importance of the Internet in our business, and though we're still miles ahead of other processing centers in the exploitation of this technology, the terminology has become a pet peeve of mine. A lot of people keep referring to the Heifer '98 program as HeiferNet. HeiferNet is N-O-T. Heifer '98. HeiferNet is an add-on product that would allow people to connect to buyers via the Internet. In the HeiferNet service, a prospective buyer would request, say, 500 Heifers. In addition, he might specify that they should be bred and confirmed pregnant, or have a minimum parent average PTA for protein, or whatever. Making that information available from farmers already using our Heifer '98 program would be automatic - for any who chooses to participate. But this service would be a natural addition for people already using Heifer '98. And again, let's emphasize flexibility. Nobody would be required to buy into HeiferNet just because he owned Heifer '98."

What else is on tap for the DRPC in the next couple of months? Stay tuned.