

Dairy Experts Focus On Heifer Calves To Boost Herds

DES MOINES, Iowa—Dairy experts across the country are looking for better ways to turn calves into healthy, high-producing cows.

"Very often, the cost of raising a replacement cow is the second or third largest cost faced by the dairy producer," explained Jud Heinrichs, a dairy scientist at Penn State University. "It can cost \$1,200 to \$1,400 or more to raise a heifer and producers want to know that's money well spent."

Heinrichs outlined heifer development research under way and areas that need addi-

tional attention. He addressed dairy researchers and extension specialists gathered in Des Moines March 16-18 for the joint Midwest meeting of the American Dairy Science Association and the American Society of Animal Science.

Some significant advances as outlined by Heinrichs:

- Researches studied the use of blood plasma from packing plants, whey from cheese production, and other protein sources and found that many of them could substitute for casein, the major form of protein found

in milk. Based on that research, feed manufacturers are able to formulate reduced-cost milk replacers without sacrificing growth, health or feed efficiency in calves.

- That research also showed the importance of calf starter diets for replacement heifers. The researchers found that heifer growth rate was most often dependent on intake from starter rations.

- The National Research Council is rewriting suggested dairy calf nutrient requirements for UIP or bypass protein. In its last set of recommendations about 10 years ago, the NRC recommended increased bypass protein levels for dairy calves, but recent research indicates that recommendation was

unnecessary and recommended levels are expected to be reduced to previous levels when new recommendations are released.

- Researchers studied how housing and environment for dairy calves interact with nutrient requirements. The researchers documented increased energy requirements of calves raised outdoors compared to calves raised indoors. They've also found that heat build-up in some calf hutches can cause calves to grow slower and be detrimental to calf health. They're now recommending that some hutches be shaded in warm weather.

Heinrichs said researchers are now turning their attention to the nutrient needs of older calves and focusing more closely

on specific components of the diet such as amino acids. They're also looking at how various health problems affect growth, development, and nutrient needs.

"We're getting more sophisticated in our approach to heifer development," noted Heinrichs. "People really want specifics on how to manage them."

Historically, less research has been conducted with heifers than with cows, Heinrichs said. But as margins get smaller and management becomes more intense, there's growing interest in heifer research.

"But people now recognize the cost of developing cows and they see the potential of good nutrition and management," he explained.

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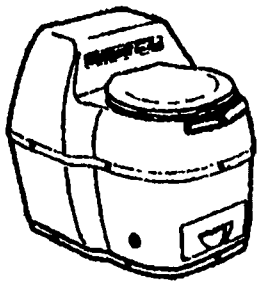
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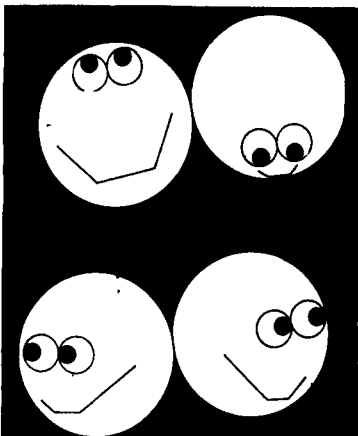
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