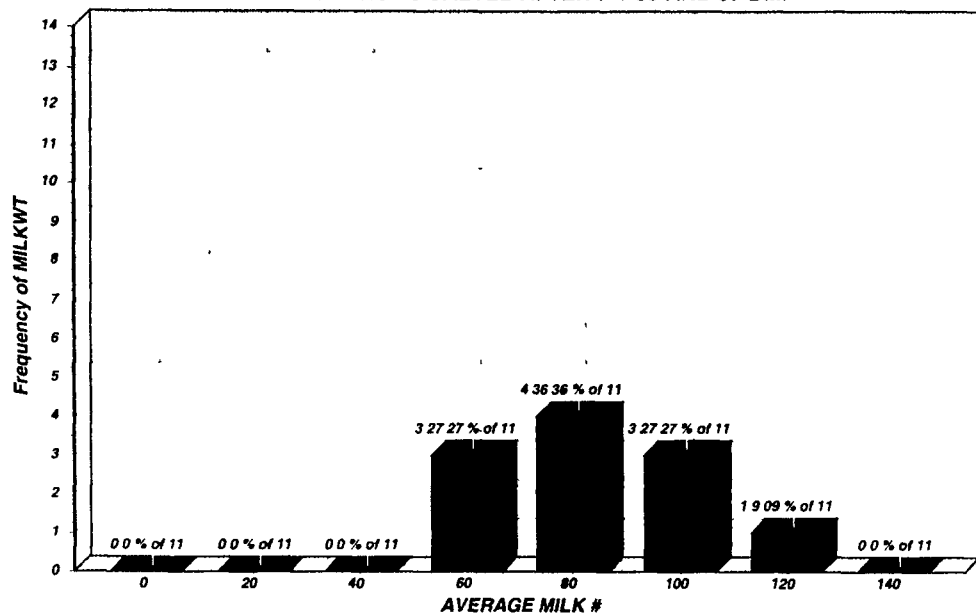


Dairyman To Dairyman

(Continued from Page D4)

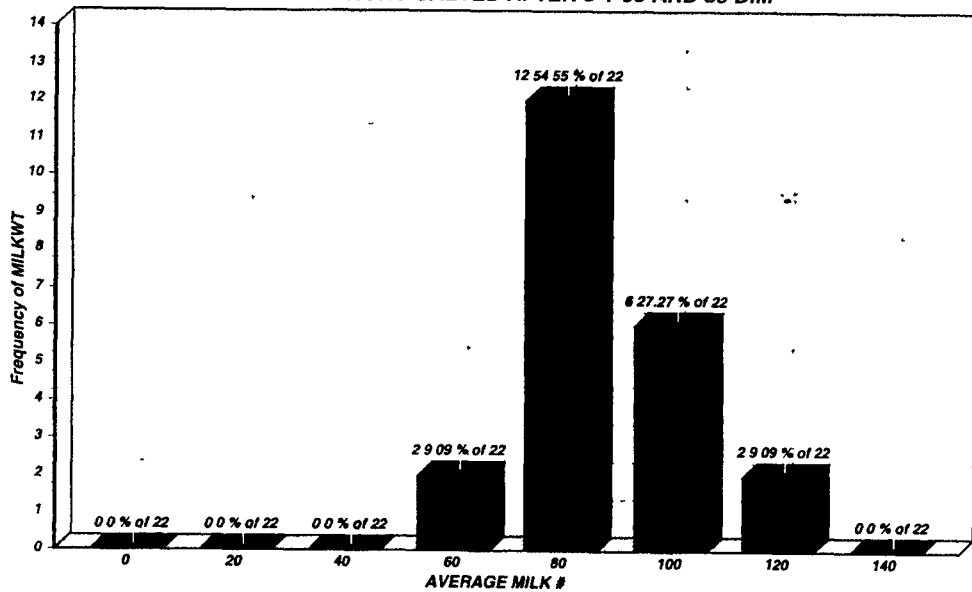
The graph below is the production of the 11 cows that calved before we changed to the prefresh program. These cows averaged 74# milk at 37 DIM and calved after 7-1-99. It is apparent that fewer cows hit above an 80# average (73%) compared to the current fresh cows. We also see that the largest group here is at 80# where the previous graph shows most at 100#.

MILK PRODUCTION FREQUENCY BEFORE PREFRESH
2+ LACTATIONS CALVED AFTER 7-1-99 AND 37 DIM



The last picture is a bit of insurance. By this, I mean that we want to compare apples to apples. We will go to the same time frame as last year just in case the difference was due more to July-August freshening versus September-October. Here we see cows that calved last September at the same days in milk (35 DIM) averaged 76# with a large majority over 80#. This 91% above eighty pounds milk is better than the current 84% as seen in the first graph. The big difference is shown above this level. We see that 36% of the cows are 100# or higher. Looking back to the first graph, that number is 56%.

MILK PRODUCTION FREQUENCY BEFORE PREFRESH
2+ LACTATIONS CALVED AFTER 9-1-98 AND 35 DIM



A total evaluation needs to be done when we see more cows calve over the next few months. It is promising that cows currently average 80# in the start of the lactation compared to the 74 - 76# that we previously saw. Sometimes we make management decisions and do not take the time to see if we are getting the predicted results. This is an example of using production information to evaluate those decisions. The trends in this herd say that the prefresh management change was needed and I would expect the results to continue to be better.

Barn Owl 2000 is the tool that I used to look at the herd production changes to determine if progress is being made.



Question: Is it necessary to use a transitional period for heifers that are put with the dry cows for their last three months of gestation?

I always recommend a transitional or prefresh diet for all animals before their next calving. I believe this to be especially needed by heifers that calve for the first time due to all the changes that happen to them during this period. What are some statistical indicators that help us reach these conclusions?

One place that I look to evaluate heifer performance and how well prepared they are to become cows is found on the third section down on the Herd Summary II. Here we see "Profile of Cows by Lactation Number." Near the center of the page is a column that states the average days to peak and the average milk at peak. In this particular herd, we see a large contrast between older cows and first lactation heifers

as we compare days to peak. The second lactation reaches its peak at 80 days and older cows at 60 days. In contrast, we see that the first lactation heifers take 130 days to reach their peak. It is normal for heifers to reach their peak slower than their older counterparts but certainly not this slow. Past first lactation, cows should reach peak milk production two to three weeks ahead of reaching peak dry matter intake. We recognize the need for proper body reserves with this bit of knowledge and prefresh diets help reduce the weight loss that is seen as cows reach peak around 60 days in milk. Heifers that are going through more changes at this time usually peak milk a bit later at 75 to 85 days in milk. The heifers that are peaking much later are telling us we have not prepared them to be milk cows.

Another evaluation that serves to tell us if we are meeting the needs of these changing animals is to look at some reproductive performance parameters and how they differ from one age group to another. Again, we look at the PA DHIA Herd Summary II Report for this information. The second section down is the "Reproductive Profile of Breeding Herd." Going right to left we come across the column labeled "Average Days to 1st Service." This herd again shows great disparity between first lactation and older cows. Performance differs little between second lactation and older cows with the average days to first service at 110

days. When we look at the first lactation animals, we see a substantial difference. Noting that the performance of the older cows could be improved reproductively, the first lactation animals show a more severe problem. Here we see these cows being bred for the first time at over 160 days. When we see that the first lactation cows make up 45 percent of the

herd it is no wonder that overall herd reproductive performance is not what we would like.

These two evaluations do not exclusively point to problems caused by lack of a transitional period. When first lactation performance lags behind the rest of the herd, bunk management and grouping needs should be addressed. The numbers seen for this herd suggest that the lack of a prefresh period might initiate problems as these new animals come into the herd. Getting off to a good start by proper preparation should be your first step.

Question: Our cows are not milking as we think they should. Can you tell by our records if they are really down or are our expectations too high?

Evaluating production trends by looking at all available information is vital to answering this question. Looking at statistics like RHA or daily milk averages by themselves will not allow us to get a feeling about production potential during a given time.

Two items found on the Herd Summary II report that I find useful when assessing if your cows are giving all they can are the "% Days in Milk" and the "Average Days in Milk." On their October test, the herd increased percent days in milk from 86 percent to 91 percent with the average days in milk for the whole herd staying the same at 197 days. This tells me that there are fresh cows entering the herd faster than we are drying cows off and the herd has potential to improve production from last month. The cows are down five pounds on the daily average when they probably should have stayed at least the same.

Another way that we can determine what the cows are capable of milking is to look at the current test period average. Typically, when percentage of days in milk increases so does the 30-day milk average. During the previous four months the percent days in milk has been stable at about 87 percent while the milk average for each one-month period has dropped from 84 to 75. This month it has dropped further to 72.8 pounds. We are seeing milk decreases when we should be seeing increases. The cows are actually producing at the year's low in October although average days in milk and percent days in milk show favorable trends.

Another figure that is useful when we compare performance to potential is to look at the 150-day adjusted milk average. This number attempts to look at cows equally throughout the year. Up until July, the 150-day average was 85 pounds for the previous 11 months. The range over those 11 months was 83 to 88 pounds. Since then, the range was 79 to 82 pounds and averaged 81 pounds for a four-month period.