

Susquehanna Dairy Day

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ELK LAKE (Susquehanna Co.) — More than 900 farmers and industry personnel packed the Elk Lake school for the 11th annual Susquehanna County Dairy Day held Friday, March 10.

While at the day-long event, dairy day participants could visit with the 68 exhibitors, attend several educational programs, or bid on a winning pie from the pie auction.

In one educational presentation, extension agronomist Mark Madden informed dairy day participants of the new products available for corn weed control.

"What's old is new again," said Madden. "The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has mandated that we use fewer pounds of active ingredient. The chemical companies are taking things we're familiar with and concentrating them or changing the formulation."

Two examples of the newer concentrated formulas are Dual II Magnum and Bicep II Magnum.

Industry mergers are also changing the face of the chemical companies and new Glyphosate products will be available in the coming years.

In the second session of the day, Madden reminded farmers that pesticide safety doesn't end at the field.

"The job isn't done when you put the sprayer away," said Madden, "What about the clothes? The greatest exposure risk for pesticides is through the skin. Clothes contaminated with pesticides put everyone who handles those clothes at risk."

Madden continued to explain that the person laundering the clothes should know the properties of the product used.

"You need to know if it's water soluble or oil soluble. Different chemicals have different needs," said Madden.

Madden suggested that the clothes be collected separately and washed as soon as possible, preferably with a liquid detergent and hot water. Multiple wash cycles or an increased amount of detergent might be needed, and line drying is preferred. After washing the chemical laden clothes, it's also advisable to clean the washer by running a cycle without clothes before doing other laundry.

"The poison is in the dose, not the material," said Madden, "Diluting the pesticides as much as possible can prevent contamination."

In addition to keeping farm workers safe, Dairy Day participants learned how to improve their dry cow nutrition program. Dr. Gabriella Varga of Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science highlighted the ongoing research programs at the University and encouraged farmers to take a look at their situation.

Goals of the dry period are to give the mammary gland a time to rest, give the fetus a chance to grow, and allow for colostrum production.

"One of the real challenges and what's really hard to measure on these farms is the dry matter intake of the dry cow. It's only been in the last few years that we in the research end have been looking at what's happening in terms of intakes in this period," said Varga.

"What happens is that the cow will not eat as much as she gets closer to calving, because she's in some discomfort and some pain. So she slowly goes down in intake," said Varga. "What you want to do is provide more nutrients to meet their requirements."

Through research on 500 cows tracked before and after calving, there was a strong correlation on the amount of feed consumed before calving and how much was consumed after calving when rations are increased to compensate for milk production.

Because fat cows eat less, Varga recommended that the cow's body composition score be calculated before dry off and that the ration be adjusted before drying the cow off in order for her to get down to an average score of 3.00 to 3.50.

"Once you start really looking at the condition of these cows from a thin cow to a fat cow, you'll be surprised to see that you have some cows that are on this fatty end. These cows that accumulate lipid in their livers are the ones that will have depressed appetites, increased days to first ovulation, decreased first service conception and increased incidence of metabolic diseases," said Varga.

Another thing that Varga stressed is the importance of cow comfort.

"I was at a large farm last year, and there was a group of lame cows and it took quite a while to get those cows from the barn to the milking parlor. The farmer put the lame cows in a group closer to the parlor," said Varga. "When those lame cows only had to walk a short distance, they went up 20 pounds

of milk per cow. Cow comfort is absolutely important, but very hard to measure."

She added that cow comfort does not end when the cow is dried off. "Anything you can do to keep those cows comfortable during the dry period, whether it's bunk space or a maternity area, is very important," she said.

Dollars are the bottom line for many producers and paying closer attention to the dry period can prevent lots of problems later on.

"It's very hard to put an actual dollar value on some of these diseases that are precipitated during the dry period like ketosis, displaced abomasum, milk fever, or fatty liver, but they're pretty expensive," said Varga.

When considering the economic picture of the dairy farms, managing risk is also an important factor. William Curley, who wears the hats of a Susquehanna County dairy farmer and an economic analyst with the International Dairy Foods Association, encouraged people to use forward contract-



Offering the winning pies for auction are State Representative Sandra Major, Rick Campbell, representing Robin Campbell, Lori Marcy, representing Kay Gow, and Jean Castrogiovanni.

ing and futures to lock in a profit for milk.

"There's no guarantee that the futures price will be profitable," Curley said.

Several guidelines must be followed when deciding to use the market as a tool. First, you

need to know your cost of production.

"If you can't recognize a profitable futures price based on your break even price, you shouldn't even be in this discussion," said Curley.

Second, Curley warned of the

If they can destroy 10% of your corn overnight,
think what they'll do with more time

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