

# ISU Extension View

News from ISU Extension to Iowa Dairy Producers

Volume 17

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January, 2006



**Chris Mondak**



**Larry Tranel**



**Dale Thoreson**

## Planning Successful Operations!

There really isn't anything magical about which system you use to produce milk. Thus, choose the system which is profitable and allows you to reach your goals. To realize success in your life's work, you must do what you enjoy, not follow another's expectations.

More cows, more milk and save the infrastructure is interpreted by most to mean large scale dairying—not necessarily the case in Iowa. Large scale farms may or may not be the most efficient from an "industry" or "agri-business" perspective. But, efficiency from an individual producer/family perspective may be quite the opposite. Thus, what may be best for one may not be the best for all or possibly not for each other.

We continually are experiencing structural change in Iowa dairying, no doubt. Modern successful dairy farms do not all look the same, have similar production or cost figures or are of the same size, shape or breed.

In the last newsletter we focused on a group of millionaire model farms that did have relatively similar base businesses. But, we also know of successful operations quite different. The bottom line of success is self defined but attains both profit and quality of life. Our hope is you enjoy both in this new year.

### **Chris Mondak**

ISU Extension Dairy Field Specialist, NW Iowa

### **Larry Tranel and Dale Thoreson**

ISU Extension Dairy Field Specialists, NE Iowa

## IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

**Helping you become your best.**

## 2006 NE IOWA DAIRY DAYS PROGRAM, 10am-3pm

### DATES / LOCATIONS

Jan. 31	Elma	KC Hall
Feb. 1	Calmar	Dairy Foundation Center
Feb. 2	Waverly	4-H Building, Fairground
Feb. 7	Rickardsville	Avalon Supper Club
Feb. 8	Ryan*	American Legion Hall

### **NE Iowa Dairy Days Topics, 2006**

- Results of 2005 Iowa Dairy Industry Survey
- Iowa's 2.8% Dairy Coalition: A unified front for our future!
- DNR rules, regulations, and updates
- Novel Nutrient Management Strategies: milking center effluent, compost barns, and sand handling and storage
- Manipulating Milk Components for Maximal Profitability
- Optimizing "Feed Efficiency"
- Milking for \$ and Fun: What's new and old with milking practices?"
- Millionaire model dairy farms: How to get there?
- Research updates from ISU, NEICBDF, and NADC

Exhibitors will be at meetings. A \$10 registration fee will cover meal and proceedings costs. Vouchers may be available from local agri-service providers or veterinarians. Bring ziploc bag of TMR and/or silage and/or grain samples for particle size analysis. (~one quart).

More **Dairy Calendar** items from NE and Western Iowa can be found on page 7. Many other Extension programs can be found by calling your local county Extension office or [www.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.extension.iastate.edu).

**ISU Extension DAIRY TEAM**  
**"Bringing Profits to Life"**

## **NE Iowa Dairy Extension Field Specialists**

### **Dairy Field Specialists**

- Dale Thoreson, 319-267-2707
- Larry Tranel, 563-583-6496
- Chris Mondak, DVM, 715-737-4230

### **Farm Management, NE**

- Robert Tigner, 641-394-2174

### **Crop Management, NE**

- Brian Lang, 563-382-2949
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### **State Dairy Specialists:**

- Dr. Lee Kilmer
- Dr. Leo Timms

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Extension programs are available to all without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability.

## **Some High Five Profit Keys:**

Keep the following basic business considerations in mind no matter what style of dairying you may be in:

### **Key 1: Keep capital costs low relative to income.**

Not all assets on dairies generate favorable returns. Know the relative profitability of your machinery and land relative to possibly more investment in dairy cows.

One financial ratio to calculate annually is your Asset Turnover Rate. This is your total "Gross" income before expenses divided by the fair market value of your farm assets. If yours is less than 30%, explore ways to use your land, facilities and machinery more efficiently or sell some low-return assets. ISU Extension's millionaire model farms average around 60% Asset Turnover Ratio from year to year. At 60% it means it takes 1.67 years to gross enough income to pay for all the assets, including land in the operation. Does your operation gross enough income to pay for all the assets in less than two years? How can others?

### **Key 2: Focus on your strengths that are profitable.**

A NE Iowa producer was relating how he just hated working with machinery. When it breaks, he still spends his time working with his cows where he knows how to generate high returns per hour and lets a higher priced mechanic do what he is best at. Using this thought judiciously, are there things you need to spend more time on that have a higher return. Some jobs, like properly packing a bunker in a short order may return \$40-\$80 per hour for an operation. However, genetics, dry matter intake, cow comfort, labor efficiency, reproduction, quality milk and forages all have some high price tags to them and may need your focus whether you are good at them or not.

### **Key 3: Stop doing things you are not good at?**

So, the above dairy producer realizes he is mechanically handicapped and that fixing machinery or things with moving parts may be better left with someone else, even for a cost, rather than let other high profit production items suffer. At the same time, this producer realizes his family life is not the one to suffer either trying to do both the herdsmanship and fix the tractor because it is cheaper. What's the cost to missing time with family to fix equipment?

If certain crops or chores overextend your time or ability, could you milk more cows if you bought the grains or jobbed the chores out? Just a thought....

### **Key 4: Identify things that are not profitable, STOP doing them and change the system.**

Our stall barn systems for average size herds, even if no cost is put on the facility, are expensive systems to operate due to reduced labor and feeding efficiencies. However, some new, high cost parlor/freestall systems are also very expensive ways to operate as well.

Labor efficiency is usually doubled (2:1 ratio) in a well designed low-cost parlor; manure management is usually doubled (2:1 ratio) in short term storage (2-3 weeks) versus daily haul; and feeding and other labor efficiencies are often more than tripled (>3:1 ratio) in freestall versus stallbarn operations. Depending on cow numbers and system setup, rotational grazing may or may not increase labor or feeding efficiencies.

### **Key 5: Know your dairy profit margin and centers.**

Profit = (Price - Cost) x Volume. There are many individual profit decisions made in the day-to-day operation, where you figure the price minus the cost to see if it is worth it. This overall Price minus Cost concept is best depicted as Operating Profit Margin which shows the percent of gross income available for labor and interest (debt) and is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{*Net Farm Income + Interest Paid - Unpaid Labor}}{\text{*Total "Gross" Income}}$$

\*both Net Farm Income and Total "Gross" Income are adjusted for inventory changes, ending minus beginning of year

### **Summary: The Operating Profit Margin in Key 5 multiplied by the Asset Turnover Ratio in Key 1 equals the key ratio of Rate of Return on Assets.**

Your Rate of Return on Assets is probably the most important measure of profitability but realize volume relative to income and cost differences are key variables, as are efficiencies of production per cow, per full-time labor equivalents and per acre. These variables heavily impact profits.

**Which efficiencies are you best at?** Low capital; labor efficient; grazing cows/forages; machinery/crop management; genetics sales; low cost; high volume per acre, cow or person; organic or specialty markets? Profit on your strengths. The days of doing it all is changing. Adopt profitable changes over time so the dairy industry doesn't leave over time.

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*by Larry Tranel, Dairy Field Specialist, NE Iowa*

**Your competitive advantage is usually what you're best at!**

## **Cottonseed Hulls as Forage Replacement in Dairy Diets**

*by Dan Waldner, OSU Extension Dairy Specialist*

Cottonseed Hulls (CSH) are a by-product of cottonseed processing to cottonseed meal. This by-product is low in protein, energy, calcium and phosphorus, but high in fiber. Published values for the nutrient content of CSH are: DM=89.9%, CP=5%, ADF=67%, NDF=86.9%, NEL=0.45Mcal/lb, Ca=0.15%, P=0.09% (National Cottonseed Products Association).

Despite poor nutrient profile, research indicates CSH are unique and may have a place in diets of dairy cows. In a series of experiments by Harris, et al. (1983), Cows consuming rations containing 30-40% CSH had higher feed intakes, greater milk yields and slightly higher milk fat percentages than cows consuming corn silage based rations.

Further, Morales et al. (1989) showed cows fed 30% CSH had greater milk and protein yield but less milk fat percent and yield compared to cows fed 35% alfalfa silage. Additionally, cows fed 35% alfalfa silage and 14% CSH ate and produced almost identically to cows fed 35% alfalfa silage. CSH had been substituted for corn (adjusted slightly with soybean meal to equalize protein). Thus, in this comparison, CSH appeared to equal corn, a much higher energy value than book values suggest.

Adams, et al. (1995) compared CSH to alfalfa (18.5% CP, 29% ADF, 40% NDF) and Bermudagrass hay (9.6% CP, 41% ADF, 81% NDF) at 11% of the diet dry matter. Milk production was 1.5 and 5.2 pounds/day and dry matter intake 1.0 and 3.8 pounds/day higher for CSH than for alfalfa and Bermuda hay diets, respectively. Milk fat percentage was 0.13 percentage units higher with CSH (3.62 vs. 3.49). Again, CSH appeared to contribute beneficial associative effects in excess of its estimated nutritive value of .45 Mcal of NEL/pound of dry matter.

CSH are palatable and can be used as a roughage source for dairy cattle, especially when good quality forages are scarce. Complete feeds or total mixed rations may contain 30 to 35% CSH. However, most producers elect to use lesser amounts of CSH (15 to 25%) and some hay or silage. The decision to use CSH should be made based upon availability, price, storage/handling facilities and existing forage supplies.

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***Did you know: The most profitable large herds are operated by extroverts and the most profitable small herds are operated by introverts. Key point: if you plan to expand and hire labor, you better enjoy working with people!***

## **Trouble-Shooting Udder Edema**

*by Ken Bolton, UW-Extension Dairy Agent*

This is an oldie but goodie! It probably doesn't hurt to review from time to time some of what we already know. Great progress has been made with minimizing the malady of fresh cow problems both using and avoiding transition cow programs. The bottom line may be to understand what contributes to these challenges then to manage to avoid them.

First, let's recognize what udder edema is and when it typically occurs. Most udder edema is related to a sharp drop in blood serum proteins close to the time of freshening. This drop is associated with the transfer of blood gamma globulins to colostrums. The drop is more severe in animals calving for the first time.

Factors that increase the incidence and severity of udder edema include:

- Protein deficiency or feeding excess protein – Feed a minimum of 12% crude protein to far off dry cows and a maximum of 16% to close ups.
- Vitamin A or Beta carotene deficiency – May be accompanied by a high rate of retained placentas and weak or stupid calves.
- Excessive mineral intake – Limit salt intake by removing free choice salt and reduce the level of salt in the ration by 50% if edema is excessive. Limit potassium to 0 to 0.8% of ration dry matter.
- Overfeeding of grain during the dry period.
- Anemia – Check blood levels of hematocrit, hemoglobin and red blood cell count.
- Poor circulation due to weak or broken udder attachments and support.
- Heavy parasite load – Check for both internal and external parasites.

Pre-milking before calving may be necessary to prevent damage from udder edema.

Check feeding programs for dry and recently fresh cows and bred heifers to make sure they are on target. Finally, take corrective measures to correct deficiencies and control problems. Treat when needed with recommended diuretics.

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***Many well known psychologists have verified the effectiveness of positive reinforcement for employees, spouses, children, colleagues, etc. so:***

***Encourage each other daily while it is still today!***

## **Feeding High Corn Silage Diets**

*Portions adapted from Jefferson County Cowscope Newsletter*

The percent of corn silage in dairy rations continues to increase due to profitable production of energy and dry matter of the crop, along with harvesting, storage and feeding efficiencies. Many are rightly taking advantage of this relative low cost, labor efficient forage with good dry matter intake potential. However, soil stewardship may be an issue.

Also consider that corn silage is a feed that is generally about one-half corn grain and one-half forage. Corn silage is lower in protein, ammonia, minerals and possibly, effective fiber. And, it is high in starch and acids both from fermentation and what is produced in the rumen. This must be considered to avoid fat test, hoof and other problems with higher corn silage diets.

Minimum NDF from forage with high corn silage rations is about 20% on a dry matter basis. Minimum recommendations for fiber are, well, minimums. When brown midrib silage is in the ration these minimums increase to 23-24%. Adding cottonseed may allow you to reduce NDF from forage by 2-3 percentage points. How do you know whether you may or may not push these levels to basement minimums? Watch fat test, manure and foot health. But, **BE SURE TO ACT BEFORE YOU SEE FOOT PROBLEMS!** By then the assault has occurred 60-90 days previously and any response is too late except to document the error.

Recommended Non-Fiber Carbohydrate (NFC) levels are 35-40%. The low level of this range is the recommended high when you've done a good job of harvesting highly digestible feed. Bumping NFC's upwards toward the high end of the range will put your cows in the danger zone of the health problems mentioned above. If the silage was quite mature and dry at harvest, a bit higher NFC's may be needed. Contrary to popular belief, more NFC/starch is not better unless the previous digestibility qualifier is confirmed.

Corn and other high starch grains may need to be mixed with high fiber byproducts to keep NFC and starch levels under control. Soy hulls, beet pulp and citrus pulp are good corn substitutes in corn silage diets. If you use these high fiber byproducts to replace forage, expect health problems if NFC levels exceed 35%. With high corn silage diets, high dietary fat concentrations may cause milk fat depression.

More supplemental protein will be needed with high corn silage diets though total protein may be able to be just slightly less (16.5-18% on dry matter basis for

early to mid-lactation cows). Rumen bugs require more protein in the form of ammonia, or protein that is broken down to ammonia, to digest the generous level of NFC in corn silage. So, degradable intake protein (DIP) becomes the primary protein concern over ration undegradable intake protein (UIP). Urea at .25 pounds raw soybeans at 2-3 pounds may address this need.

Ration UIP can likely be set at 35-40% of the total crude protein. Byproducts of corn, including corn distillers grains, don't work well from an amino acid profile standpoint as higher lysine products like roasted beans, heat treated soybean meal and meat meal.

Other considerations are to properly supplement high corn silage rations with adequate concentrations of calcium, magnesium, potassium and sulfur. Buffers like sodium bicarbonate at the rate of 1% will help but will not totally buffer out rumen acid. A mixture of 3 parts bicarb to 1 part magnesium oxide is a better buffer than either one fed alone. Be on the lookout for sorting of the total mixed ration.

Also, be prepared as temperatures warm next summer as high corn silage rations may have a shorter bunk life. Feeding twice each day and/or including an additive containing *L. buchneri* at ensiling or a propionic-based mixed acid may need to be added at feedout to keep the ration fresh.

## **Why Not More Alfalfa?**

*adapted from Charlie Brummer, ISU*

Alfalfa is the third most widely cultivated crop in Iowa--grown on 1-1.5 million acres. Alfalfa has the most desirable combination of yield and nutritive value of commonly grown forage crops.

Inclusion of alfalfa or other forage in crop rotations with corn and soybeans can help break pest cycles, improve water and soil quality, and improve farm income. Without government crop subsidy, I'll bet that no one can show ANY data suggesting that corn and soybeans can net a farmer more money than alfalfa.

As a legume, alfalfa fixes atmospheric nitrogen, making it available for plant growth. A several-year-old field of alfalfa, when rotated into row crops, can supply enough nitrogen for TWO years of corn production!

From a research perspective, alfalfa is fairly easy to manipulate. It can be propagated vegetatively, crossing can be accomplished without too much difficulty, abundant wild germplasm is available for study, and a substantial amount of breeding has already been conducted. So, should crop producers consider more forage in their rotation?

## **Managing and Marketing Quality**

### **Holstein Steers** *by Dale Thoreson*

Excerpts below are from the 4-State Dairy Beef Conference. The entire proceedings or a CD are available for \$30.00 by contacting <http://www.wasa.org>

### **The Evaluation of Distillers Co-Products in Dairy Beef Production** *by A. Trenkle, Iowa State University*

Holstein steers fed Wet Distillers Grains and Solubles (DGS) had superior feed efficiency compared with those fed Dry DGS. Feeding 40% or 50% of the diet dry matter as wet DGS depressed feed intake, gain and carcass weight. Feeding wet or dry DGS did not affect carcass measurements or economic value. Wet or Dry DGS can be fed to Holstein steers without affecting performance, carcass value, color stability or steaks during retail display or consumer rating of sensory/palatability traits of the steaks.

Depending on price of DGS relative to corn and protein supplement, feeding DGS might reduce feed cost of gain. When DGS price was 80% or 90% of corn (dry basis) there was always a positive return from feeding wet or dry DGS.

### **Efficacy of On-Farm Pasteurized Waste Milk Systems on Upper Midwest Dairy and Custom Calf Rearing Operations** *by M Jorgensen, P. Hoffman & A. Nytes, University of Wisconsin, Madison*

The authors reported on a study of 31 farms that pasteurize waste milk on the farm. Twelve point eight percent of the farms did not get adequate pasteurization as measured by the Alkaline Phosphatase (AP) test. Pasteurization did not change milk components such as fat, protein, lactose or energy content. Pasteurization reduced bacterial plate count (8,822,000 CFU/mL to 35 CFU/mL), all forms of bacteria (E. Coli, staph. Aureous, strep. Agalactia and Enterococcus) but did not reduce Somatic Cell Count. Bottom line is that on-farm pasteurization of waste milk is very effective, but producers should measure AP activity periodically to make sure the waste milk is heated high enough and for the proper length of time.

### **Manipulating Forage-to-Concentrate Ratios to Enhance Performance and Carcass Traits of Holstein Steers.** *by A. DeCostanzo, Univ of Minnesota*

A review of the research on forage to concentrate ratios used to feed Holstein steers. Upper limit for the growing phase is no more than 55 percent forage. Corn silage has a slight advantage over alfalfa hay or silage, partially because the greater metabolizability of

corn silage. Higher forage rates above 55% reduce gains, feed conversion and can adversely affect carcass traits. Program feeding may offer the best management option for enhancing feed conversion and feed cost of gain.

## **Bi-lingual Calf Care Workshop**

*by Chris Mondak, Extension Dairy Field Specialist*

What happens to a calf when she is first born and in her first few hours of life impacts her chances for survival, and her chances to reach her productive potential as a lactating cow. To help dairy owners and their employees review important calving assistance and newborn calf management procedures, ISU Extension partnered with Agri-Education, Inc and PDHGA to host a Calf Care Workshop in English and Spanish on Sept. 30 in Rock Rapids (Lyon County) Iowa for 20 NW Iowa dairy owners and herdspersons

Dr. Howard Tyler, ISU Dairy Science instructor and calf research scientist, conducted a classroom-style session aimed at helping people understand when and how to assist the calving process. With translators Bert Van Dam and Rafael DeLira, herdsman at Hickory Hills Dairy, Dr. Tyler explained what is going on with both cow and calf during the calving process, gave demonstrations on when and how to pull a calf, and gave guidelines on colostrum management.

Richard Harrington, Midlands Bioproducts, led the group through a hands-on practice with Midlands' Colostrum Test Kit, which comes with instructions in English and Spanish. The kit measures actual IgG level in colostrum, thus a more accurate evaluation of colostrum quality than is the colostrometer.

The group traveled to near-by Rock Bottom Dairy, owned and operated by dairyman and nutritionist, Bernie Bakker. The dairy staff graciously allowed their calves to be used to help teach participants the correct ways to tube feed a newborn, to dip the navel cord stub in iodine, to judge calf hydration status, and to collect a blood sample from calves' jugular veins. The group then practiced using Midlands' IgG Test Kit, which is useful to determine if a 24+ hour old calf has received adequate maternal antibodies from colostrum feedings; the test helps a dairy owner monitor effectiveness of colostrum management procedures.

ISU Extension plans to offer the Calf Care Workshop in 2006 at multiple sites across the state. If interested in attending or hosting the workshop, please contact your ISU Extension Dairy Field Specialists Dale Thoreson, 319-267-2707 or Larry Tranel (563-583-6496), and in Western Iowa, contact Chris Mondak (712-737-4230).

## **New Option for Low Cost Milking Center Wastewater Disposal**

*by Dan Meyer, Extension Ag Engineer, NE Iowa*

This option is for dairies with no parlor water. It was demonstrated August 31 in Goodhue, MN on a dairy farm by the University of Minnesota Ag Engineering Department. It was one of several milking center wastewater disposal options demonstrated. They demonstrated an aerobic system and media filter both of which went to leach fields and a year-around irrigation system with special wobbler sprinklers which drained back into a holding tank in the grass field disposal area. They plan a three year research study on the systems. The most promising and by far the cheapest system was called the bark strip treatment.

The milking center wastewater needs to be drained into a septic tank ( 1000 gallon capacity at least) that holds it for at least four days so heavier solids can settle out and lighter solids can float to the top. The normal five day BOD (biological oxygen demand) after septic tank primary treatment is about 2200 mg/L. The average total phosphorus is 51 mg/L, the ammonia 21 mg/L and total nitrogen 94 mg/L. These parameters show it is too high a nutrient level to discharge into streams, ditches or tile lines. The bark system design they used to treat the milking center wastewater was two long narrow strips above ground (see picture below). Soil is not good enough to transfer the oxygen



to break down the nutrients so bark is used. The bark provides a carbon source for the aerobic microorganisms. It is also a good insulator in winter so the system doesn't freeze up. The bark strip is located in a relatively flat area (<5% slope). The grass is cut and taken off first and then the ground is scarified or lightly tilled. A septic leach field commercial product called a chamber system is placed on the scarified surface. The chamber system is an inverted U shape looking piece of plastic 24 inches wide, high and long with slits on the side. A 2 inch PVC pipe is placed under the top of the chamber pieces with holes drilled in the bottom sized for the pump chosen. The 2 inch

pipe end in each strip is openable for clean-out. The chamber system is covered with 12 inches of bark and the rest of 15 ft wide strips 18 inches of bark. The 60 cow barn in the field research study had two bark strips about 15 ft wide and 60 ft long (based on 30 sq ft per cow). Liquids are pumped every other day into the two 2 inch pipes.

For management one important item is to not discharge any waste milk down the drain because the five day BOD level for it is 100,000 mg/L. Ideally a filter is placed on the end of the outlet line of a septic tank before it discharges into the leach fields to minimize solids leaving. This filter is accessible for cleaning periodically from above the tank. Note, in this milking center wastewater disposal option a small submersible pump would send it to the 2 inch pipes. The holding tank needs to be cleaned once a year. The bark in the strips needs replenishing annually.

For more information on the milking center wastewater field research study check out the web site [www.bae.umn.edu/extens/milkhouse](http://www.bae.umn.edu/extens/milkhouse) from the University of Minnesota or contact Dan Meyer at Fayette County Extension at 563-425-3331 or e-mail: [djmeyer@iastate.edu](mailto:djmeyer@iastate.edu). This item and the other disposal systems demonstrated on August 31 field day will be discussed at the winter Dairy Days meetings.

### **Western Iowa Dairy Program Calendar**

- Jan 17-18 Winning the Game- Milk Marketing Workshop- 1/17 at Sioux Co Ext; 1/18 at Lyon Co. Extension, 472-2576
- Jan 20-21 Women in Denim Conference – Buena Vista Univ., Storm Lake, 800-242-5022
- Jan 31 1st Annual I-29 Corridor Dairy Mtg – Sioux Falls Ramkota Inn, 605-688-4116
- Feb 1 Osceola County Area Dairy Peer Group – Sibley Pizza Ranch, 12-2pm
- Feb 15-16 4-State Dairy Management Conference NICC – Sheldon & Holstein, 737-4230
- Feb 21 -22 PC Dart –DHI Records Workshop 2/21 at Cherokee Co. Ext., 2/22 at Rock Valley Library

### **Eastern Iowa Dairy Calendar**

- Jan 6-7 Farm Couples Getaway, Dubuque Midway Hotel, 563-583-6496
- Jan-Feb **NE Iowa Dairy Days** (consult front page)
- Feb 14 Dairy Builders Conference, Calmar, 267-2707
- Feb 14-16, Dairy Foundation Compost Bedding Dairy Tour to New Ulm, Minnesota, 563-534-9957
- March 10 Eastern Iowa Dairy Conference, Calmar  
Low-Cost Parlor Tours coming in March

## ***Producer Profile: Ken and Rhonda Weg***

### **The Wegs Use Dairy Advisory Team to Make Improvements in Herd Management and Quality of Life**

Three years ago, things were looking grim for Ken and Rhonda Weg, owner/operators of a 60-cow Holstein herd in Northwest Iowa. Milk production slipped 4,000lbs, cows were not getting bred back, and the day-to-day chore routine was not allowing Ken and Rhonda adequate time to spend together with their two school age children. As they tell it, "Life on the farm was not fun anymore. We aren't getting rewards for all the work we put in." This is the story from Rhonda Weg about how they got an Advisory Team started, and the positive rewards they've gained from this experience.

**Why did you start a dairy advisory team?** "We heard about dairy advisory teams from Carolyn Bootsma, our AMPI field rep. We then invited Vern Oraskovich, University of Minnesota Extension specialist, to speak at our AMPI Young Cooperators meeting. We knew we were having problems and wanted to get a better handle on production and dairy records. We wanted to "work smarter not harder", and were fascinated by the idea of getting all our advisors together at one table to talk about our situation and possible solutions."

**How did you get your team started?** "We visited with our ISU Dairy Extension specialist, and agreed that a team approach would be worth a try. We gave her permission to contact our advisors, make an agenda, and coordinate the meetings."

**Who is on your Advisory Team?** "All our advisors come together: We have the veterinarian, our nutritionist, banker, AMPI field representative, our farm management specialist, calf nutritionist specialist, AI representative, and ISU Extension specialist."

**What are these meetings like? What happens at a typical meeting?** "We meet at lunch time from 12 – 2:30pm at the meeting room in our local Pizza Ranch. We visit over lunch, and then start in on the agenda. Each person talks about issues from their perspective, and then everyone learns about how things fit together. I'm assuming this helps **everyone** personally and professionally."

**In your view, has this use of an Advisory Team been helpful to you?** "We feel like every aspect of our dairy is being looked at and represented at the table. Plus, the team approach makes everyone accountable— everyone on the team makes sure tasks

don't slide because they know they have to report on things at the next meeting. This is a pressure, but it's a **good** kind of pressure. It keeps us from being too lax."

**What are some specific changes or improvements that have happened as a result of your Advisory Team meetings?** "We started paying more attention to our herd records, and got started on PC Dart – which is a wonderful tool. We switched from bull breeding and learned AI breeding, using pre-synch and ovsynch. For the first time, we have extra heifers available to sell. Right now we have 49 of our own heifers on place. We can just about replace our entire herd! We started a Transition Cow ration, and this has helped tremendously....we don't have very many fresh cow problems any more."

We also shuffled around existing facilities to make a Pre-fresh area. This has really made our maternity and newborn calf chores a lot easier. No more hunting for the fresh cow in the pasture, and no more hauling in calves a long distance from the pasture.

The team identified problems with body condition score in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> calf heifers, and recommended a separate area for younger cows and fresh cows. So, now we're in the middle of finishing a low-cost hoop barn structure to give extra housing and bunkline space for these cows.

And we're now monitoring our youngstock growth rates to make sure the replacements are in the right condition for breeding and calving. I really can't say enough good things about having an Advisory Team. We probably would not have learned things so quickly if we were just going it alone."

## **Overall Women Conference**

Spend time to benefit yourself on February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> at the Overall Women Conference in Cedar Rapids. It's for women involved in agriculture, whether it is managing their own farm operations, as business partners, or just wanting to learn more about the issues, challenges and impacts of today's agriculture.

Farm broadcaster and motivational speaker Colleen Callahan of Kickapoo, Illinois, will be the keynoter and will share her personal experiences on breaking into a male dominated profession. Colleen's creed is "To communicate is the beginning of understanding."

Come for both days, or register for a single day. Register early by January 27 for both days of the conference for the price of \$100. Visit the web site <http://www.ucs.iastate.edu/mnet/overallwomen/home.html> or call 800-262-0015.

# **WESTERN IOWA DAIRY ALLIANCE**

*Chris Mondak, Iowa State University  
Dairy Extension Field Specialist*

“Hats Off!” to the group of western Iowa dairy producers, agri-business representatives, community planners, and extension workers who took on the task this summer of attending extra meetings to form a viable Western Iowa Dairy Alliance. Not only did they succeed in forming a Vision and Mission Statement to express the overall interests of the western Iowa dairy community, but they also completed a Strategic Planning process that identified and prioritized important issues for Iowa and the Iowa dairy industry. Here are the important products of their efforts:

## **Western Iowa Dairy Alliance**

### **VISION STATEMENT:**

The Vision of the Western Iowa Dairy Alliance is to have all sizes of dairy producers and all types of industry partners working together to expand dairy production.

We believe Iowa is a premier dairy producing region.

We are willing to serve as leaders and as the voice for the western Iowa dairy industry.

### **OUR MISSION:**

- We will be advocates for dairy growth and the advancement of the supporting dairy infrastructure, working to build a thriving industry for producers and their families.
- We will be leaders in the use of technology and dairy science to sustain the environment and raise healthy, productive herds.
- We will be liaisons to help establish beginning farmers and assist the continuation of existing farms.
- We will strive to expand continuing education for dairy owners and herdsman, and support dairy science education in high schools and colleges.
- We will work to increase support of the dairy industry through public and political awareness efforts.

### **PRIORITY ISSUES TO ADDRESS 2005-2006:**

- Assist current and beginning farmers
- Develop financing strategies for expansions, improvements, growth
- Recruit new dairies
- Educate the public about the dairy industry
- Shape public policy

After developing a Vision Statement, Mission Statement, and Priority Issues List through a Strategic Planning process this summer, the group formed a Steering Committee to work on the next phase of taking action on priority issues identified. Leading the WIDA Steering Committee as co-chairman are 3 western Iowa dairy producers: Lee Maassen, Sioux County; Kurt Wierda, Osceola County; Mark Wilcox, Cherokee County. Here are their viewpoints about Iowa's dairy industry and on the role and importance of the WIDA:

“As vibrant and as good as the dairy industry is in western Iowa, there is a need to have a unified voice to represent this region. It is important that we continually give input to those working for the dairy industry on the state level on important issues such as the environmental quality, financial strategies, and the public perception and understanding of the dairy industry. The Western Iowa Dairy Alliance is a group effort to keep industry vibrant for all sizes of dairy operations.”

**Lee Maassen.**

“Regarding the current efforts to grow the Iowa dairy industry, I don't see this growth as a competitive threat to me as a dairy producer. Cows are going to be milked somewhere in this country – why not in Iowa? My focus is on looking at developing dairy livestock operations as a way to add to local community growth. I see the future of small schools in peril unless we get our town population numbers up. Encouraging dairy farm start-up or growth is a viable economic development venture. I want to see our small towns survive.” **Mark Wilcox.**

“The Western Iowa Dairy Alliance is a way to help support our state-wide dairy producer organization, the Iowa State Dairy Association. ISDA is our voice in Des Moines, and it is important that the Iowa dairy industry keep active representation at the state level.” **Kurt Wierda**

Dairy producers in NW Iowa are actively involved in shaping the Western Iowa Dairy Alliance into a viable representative voice for the western Iowa dairy community. All member of the western Iowa dairy community – dairy producers, dairy consultants, agri-service providers are welcome to join the Western Iowa Dairy Alliance by contact the co-chairs for information about future opportunities and meetings.

# The Iowa Dairy Farm Survey

By Robert Tigner, Farm Management Field Specialist

During late winter and spring 2000, an opinion and management practices survey of dairy farms located in the Northeast Iowa Community-Based Dairy Foundation, Calmar, Iowa membership area. The purpose of the survey was to obtain baseline information about the area dairy farms. The survey gathered dairy herd management, facilities, cropping, financial, demographic, health and issues opinion data.

During the Dairy Foundation program planning process, a need for information to base programs on was identified. A dairy industry coalition was also formed during 2004-05 which also was in need of current opinion and concerns of dairy producers in Iowa. ISUE personnel also had discussed conducting the dairy survey again to update information gathered during the 2000 survey. This update would provide information about ISUE programming impact and outcome needed for USDA reports.

The Iowa Department of Economic was requested by the Dairy Foundation to support survey costs; mailing, survey instrument printing, data entry, purchase statistical analysis software and produce reports. This grant request was approved.

A list of all Iowa milk license permittees was obtained from the Dairy Control Division of the Iowa Department of Agriculture. This list contained the names and addresses of all Iowa dairy farm operators licensed to sell milk including goat and sheep dairies. One half of these dairies were chosen to be surveyed. A serial number was assigned to each entry and a coin tossed to choose serial members ending in either odd or even numbers. Even numbered entries were chosen.

The survey instrument used was an edited version of the 2000 survey instrument. A few questions were added regarding farm operator opinions on the state of Iowa dairy industry and what could be done to change its' direction. Instruments were then mailed to all chosen farms, a reminder card after two weeks a second instrument to non-respondents and two more reminder cards. The response rate was more than 44%. Returned survey instruments were taken to the Department of Rural Sociology to be coded and entered for analysis by SPSS. Written comments were then copied. Initial data analysis was then conducted by Robert Tigner, ISUE. Further data analysis will be conducted and comparison to the 2000 NE Iowa Dairy Survey will be undertaken with more results to follow at a later date.

## Partial Results of the Survey

Initial data analysis indicates that 55% of Iowa dairy farm operators are concerned about the condition of the industry and 53% believe action should be taken to stabilize the industry.

Beginning and start up farm operations are a concern, finances and labor are the issues most often agreed to as holding back new dairy operations. Current dairy farm operators are willing to take several actions that could help beginning dairy farmers overcome some of the issues they face. Along with start up dairy farms, a question was asked about the dairy operators' transition plan for the dairy business. Almost one-fourth of the dairies indicated they would simply quit milking and 21% said they had none. 40% of dairy operators will bring a family member into the dairy business.

Questions about dairy industry-wide issues were asked. These included questions about Federal price supports, milk price volatility, land use planning and the environment.

## Conclusions

Dairy farm operators view beginning dairy farms as an issue that programs and policies which university, community college and possibly the legal community and legislature must address. Operators are also willing to take actions to assist beginning dairy farmers.

Dairy farm operators do not have a uniform opinion or majority opinion on many of the issues often discussed in a variety of formats. The CWT program, a voluntary supply management program operated by the National Milk Producers Federation, is viewed by a majority of operators as having a positive impact, but 39% believed it has had no impact. A majority of dairy farm operators believe that a Johnes' control program should be started in Iowa, but there was no majority agreement on stray voltage policy. A small majority of dairy farm operators agree with adoption of state wide zoning to prevent urban encroachment on agricultural land and over 2/3 approve of local government restrictions on non-farm uses of land in agricultural areas.

Milk price volatility has been extreme in the last 4 years. Policy alternatives that are preferred are: Do nothing-32%, continue CWT (voluntary supply control)-24%, raise milk support price-20% and set milk production quotas-11%. More information on other results from the Iowa Dairy Farm Survey will follow.