

ISU Extension View

News from ISU Extension to Iowa Dairy Producers

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March 2003



Wow! What a response to our winter dairy programming efforts. It was great to see so many of you in the series of Extension meetings, parlor tours and individual farm visits.

We are well on our way to developing an Iowa dairy financial database but still need more producers to join the Dairy TRANS analysis for more confidence in the benchmarks. If you are interested in having a detailed financial analysis done free of charge please give us a call.

Farm stress continues to be an issue. The participants in the Farm Couple Getaways learned important personality temperments, communication skills and resource issues to better manage their farm and family. Have a safe planting season and greener pastures.

Dale Thoreson / Larry Tranel
ISU Extension Field Specialists
Dairy/Beef and Forages

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension

Milking Parlor Tours

On behalf of the 732 participants who viewed the low-cost milking parlors, ISU Extension would like to thank the 19 producers who hosted us. A lot of good ideas were shared giving insight and inspiration to many wrestling with their future in the dairy industry. Many were amazed that old herringbone parlors could be remodeled for less than \$2,000 or that new parlors could be built in stall barns for less than \$10,000. It's amazing the creativity spent rather than money.

Increasing both labor efficiency and quality of life by reducing the labor hours needing to milk was one goal of the parlor tours. As important is the increased safety over stall or flat barn milking and the reduction of daily back and knee breaking exercises.

Realizing "low-cost" is not always the best, it is a good place to start as each producer discerns his or her desires, goals and objectives relative to milking and their future in the dairy industry.

For a copy of the handout "Remodeled Parlors" simply give Dale Thoreson or Larry Tranel a call in NE Iowa and Chris Mondak a call in NW Iowa. If you'd like us to do a facility assessment to help determine if a low-cost milking parlor could be part of your future, simply give us a call. Best wishes to those remodeling their dairy operations this summer.

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ISU Extension DAIRY TEAM
"Bringing Profits to Life"

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NE Iowa Dairy Extension Field Specialists

Dairy/Beef and Forages

- Dale Thoreson, 319-267-2707
- Larry Tranel, 563-583-6496

Agriculture Engineering

- Dr. Dan Meyer, 319-425-3331

Farm Management

- Robert Tigner, 641-394-2174

Crop Management

- Brian Lang, 563-382-2949
- George Cummins, 641-228-1453

State Dairy Specialists:

- Dr. Marj Faust
- Dr. Lee Kilmer
- Dr. Leo Timms

NE Iowa Dairy and Forages Calendar

April

2 Dairy Heifer Facility Tour (see note inside)

NE IOWA Pasture Walks

May

26 Dan & Bonnie Beard, 2954 Middle Sattre RD, 7 miles NE of Decorah, 1 pm, CLA project discussion

June

11 Dan Pfab 16310 12 mile Rd, 4 miles south of Dubuque, 1 pm, remodeled parlor and new dairy start-up

26 Andrew Jackson Demo Farm, Y61, Andrew, 6:30 pm

July

7 John and Gene Tinker, 2.3 miles south of Littleport on X21

16 Mark Kruse, 2601 Lafayette Ridge RD Lansing, 1 pm, transitioning Organic dairy to pasture

July

29, 30, 31 Upper Midwest Grazing Conference, Midway Hotel, LaCrosse, WI 563-583-6496 for information (or see agenda inside).

Manure Management Update for Dairy

As manure management regulations continue to evolve and be implemented in Iowa, some important changes have recently become effective that may affect your dairy.

For confinement feeding operations, or dairies where cows are kept under roof at all times, the facility size requirement has changed for people needing a manure management plan. Under previous regulatory requirements, facility size for manure management plans was determined by animal weight capacity. If you had more than 400,000 pounds of dairy animals in confinement you needed to have a manure management plan and you needed to be certified to apply manure from that facility.

Under the new regulatory requirements, if you have more than 500 animal units in confinement, you will need to have a manure management plan and you will need to be certified to apply manure from that facility unless you have the manure applied commercially. 500 animal units is equal to 500 veal calves, 500 dairy feeders, 500 dairy fat cattle, 500 dairy replacement animals or 357 mature dairy cattle. If the number of animals you have by production system is greater than 500 animal units you will need a manure management plan. Also, if the total number of animals you have in confinement, regardless of species or production phase exceeds 500 animal units you will need a manure management plan.

Manure management plans are now required to be submitted annually to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. If you are a confinement feeding operation and previously filed a plan with IDNR, you will now have to do that annually. The plans will have to be filed on the appropriate forms from IDNR and you will have to pay an annual compliance fee.

Dairy operations that are not confinement feeding operations, while not required to have manure management plans, should be aware that they are required to register their animal feeding operations with IDNR if their operation is considered an open feedlot and greater than 1,000 animal units (approximately 714 mature dairy cattle), or if their dairy operation is considered an open feedlot and is between 300 and 1,000 animal units and discharges directly to waters of the state. An open feedlot is defined as “ an unroofed, or partially roofed animal feeding operation in which no crop, vegetation, or forage growth or residue cover is maintained during the period that animals are confined.”

Finally, dairy facilities that are either confinement facilities or open lots, regardless of size must maintain separation distances for land application of manure for designated areas. If manure from these facilities is injected or incorporated on the same date, there is no separation distance from a designated area. If manure is not injected or incorporated on the same date, separation distances of 200 feet or 800 feet may apply (50 feet with buffers for some areas). For more information, please see “[Separation Distances for Land Application of Manure](#)”, DNR –113, a IDNR fact sheet.

For more information regarding manure management regulation and how they affect dairy facilities, please contact your local Extension Dairy Specialist, or visit the Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG) web page at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/immag/>

Angie Rieck-Hinz, Extension Program Specialist, Department of Agronomy, ISU

Dairy Heifer and Transition Cow Facility Tour on

April 2nd will feature the Robert Thompson's new heifer barn and remodeled calf housing at 10 a.m. The Thompsons have recently built a new heifer barn and have remodeled their calf housing. The Thompson farm is located 5 miles north of Waterville or 10 miles east of Waukon on Elon Road. Turn north on Dalby Road and travel to 1433 Knudtson Road.

The second stop will be at Johanningmeier Dairy at noon where a tour of their new dry and transition cow facilities will be given. A light lunch will be served before moving to the final stop. Johanningmeier Dairy is 1/2 mile east of Rossville, 853 Hwy 76, Monona.

The final stop will be at the Jim and JoAnn Duvel Farm at 2 pm. The Duvels have also recently built new heifer facilities. The Duvel farm is at 318 Bethlehem Drive, Postville. From Waukon, take Hwy 9 west to Hwy 51. Turn south on Hwy 51 and travel 3 miles to Bethlehem Drive. Turn east and go to 318 Bethlehem Drive. Contact the Allamakee County Extension office for information at **563-568-6345**.

Influencing Productive Life Through Genetics

If you purchase (or sell) replacement heifers, it is likely that you have been thinking about ways to reduce your dairy needs for replacements. During the past few years, the cost of dairy replacement heifers has increased greatly while the value of cull cows has changed little. The result is that it now is more important to keep cows productive, healthy, and in the herd longer in order to reduce dairy costs for replacements.

The first line of “attack” for improving longevity of cows is to address management issues such as cow comfort, reproductive programs, transition cow programs, mastitis/milk quality programs, etc. However, proper attention to genetics can help to curb losses in productive life that occur as we select for higher yielding cattle. Genetic strategies to address productive life include three premises.

1) Selecting bulls with a balanced emphasis on productive life— use Net Merit \$

In the US, the genetic measure for addressing longevity in dairy cattle is Productive Life or PL. Productive Life is expressed as a predicted transmitting ability (PTA), thus the PTA for PL represents the average expected advantage or disadvantage in total months of productive life for daughters of cows and bulls. In the May 2002 USDA-DHIA Sire Summary, the PL for the best bull is 5.1 months and is -3.2 months for the poorest bull. Thus, daughters of these bulls are expected to differ in PL by 8.3 months or nearly one full lactation.

Although productive life is an important criterion for genetic selections, this is not the only trait that is necessary for breeding profitable cattle. Dairies are well aware that other traits such as yield traits, feed costs, udder traits, functional type, mastitis resistance, and cull value also influence whether cows are profitable. Further, PL will not respond to genetic selection as readily as will traits such as milk yield, protein yield, and stature. *For commercial dairy cattle in most milk markets in the Upper Midwest, the genetic measure that incorporates the available economically important traits including PL according to their respective values towards cow profitability is Net Merit Dollars (NM\$).*

2) Mating decisions for cows to address productive life – pay attention to inbreeding

Selecting superior parents is the first step towards breeding dairy cows that are more profitable and exhibit longer productive lives. The second step in this process is mating these parents to avoid excessive inbreeding; because high levels of inbreeding can result in depressed longevity, reproduction, and survival and increased susceptibility to disease. Crossbreeding is the ultimate way to reduce inbreeding, and we had an article about crossbreeding strategies in a previous newsletter. *Avoiding excessive inbreeding levels starts with reliable ID systems and accurate 4- or more generation records on parentage. Using these reliable records, matings should maximize NM\$ adjusted for inbreeding effects.*

3) Mating decisions for heifers to address productive life – pay attention to inbreeding and calving difficulty

Heifers may be culled prematurely and/or lost due to a number of factors, and using NM\$ for selections and accounting for inbreeding when making matings can be useful for improving stayability and longevity for heifers. In addition, minimizing dystocia is an important and useful ‘genetic’ strategy for improving heifer stayability (and calf livability). To minimize longevity losses due to dystocia, Service Sire Calving Ease scores for bulls should be considered for heifer matings. Typically, this will mean that the use of bulls with %DBH of more than 10% should be avoided when breeding heifers. Matings to heifers should maximize NM\$ while accounting for inbreeding effects and percentage of difficult births in heifers (%DBH).

Take Home Points:

- 1) The genetic measure for addressing longevity in US dairy cattle is Productive Life (PL).
- 2) Use a balanced approach to make genetic selections – balance PL with other important traits – for Midwest markets, use Net Merit Dollars (NM\$) to rank service sires.
- 3) Mate cows to maximize NM\$ adjusted for inbreeding level, because excessive inbreeding reduces survivability and shortens productive life.
- 4) For heifer matings, maximize NM\$ while accounting for inbreeding effects and percentage of difficult births in heifers (%DBH).

Marjorie A. Faust, Extension Dairy Specialist and Associate Professor, Iowa State University Extension

Low Potassium Forages, Can We Grow Them?

You know that a normal to high level of potassium (K) in your dry cow's diet is the primary cause of milk fever. We can treat milk fever in the cow with several products that provide additional calcium into the blood stream. The problem is we are missing some, or possibly many, sub-clinical milk fever cases where cows are lethargic, don't perform well in those first 60 days of lactation, but don't show clinical signs of milk fever.

The simple way to address this problem is to feed a low (less than 2%) potassium forage during the three to four weeks prior to calving. Unfortunately it is difficult to find forages low in potassium. Corn silage is an exception at 1.2 percent potassium but there are limits to the amount we can use without feeding dry cows too much energy.

Work in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and other states has shown that we can reduce potassium content of forages by not applying potassium fertilizers or manure. Also, second cuttings are lower than first and legumes can be as low as grasses depending on soil potassium content. But what happens on Iowa soils?

Last fall, at the North East Iowa Research Farm at Nashua, we set out a long-term trial to determine the time it takes to lower the potassium content of forages, the yield of these low potassium forages, and the affect of added chlorine (an anion) in developing forages that help prevent milk fever. Species and varieties seeded included: Duke Orchard grass, Bounty Smooth Brome grass, Palatine Reed Canary grass and Somerset alfalfa.

A zero and 70-pound rate of potash (K_2O) will be used along with a zero and 100-pound rate of calcium chloride ($CaCl_2$). Data will be collected through 2006. Each cutting will be analyzed for the major minerals.

Several groups including the Floyd County Hay Growers, the Butler County Dairy Promoters, National Animal Disease Lab, Iowa State University Experiment Station and Iowa State University Extension are sponsoring this research.

By Dale Thoreson, ISUE Field Specialist, Dairy/Beef and Forages

Upper Midwest Grazing Conference

Midway Best Western, LaCrosse, WI July 29, 30 and 31, 2003

DAY 1, Tuesday, July 29

DAIRY EMPHASIS

10:00 am **Keeping Dairy Grazing Simple, Panel Discussion**

Moderated by Dave Wachter; **Panelists:** Art Thicke, LaCrescent, MN; Vance/Bonnie Haugen, Canton, MN; Mark Brown, Dodgeville, WI; Nick Rolling, Waterville, IA

1:00 pm **Developing a Profitable Dairy Grazing Model**

Larry Tranel, ISU Extension Dairy/Beef and Forage Field Specialist

2:45 pm **Remodeled Low-Cost Parlor Tour** from IA, MN and WI

3:45 pm **Grazing Dairy Heifers**, Roger Imideke, grazier, New London, MN

7:30 pm Keynote: **Grazing Around the World (New Zealand, Ireland and Australia)**
John Cockrell, Grazing Consultant and former UW Extension Agriculture Agent

9:00 pm **Networking Social**

DAY 2, Wednesday, July 30

DAIRY AND LIVESTOCK EMPHASIS

Dairy Breakout Sessions

8:00am **Low-Cost Housing and Feeding Systems**

Dr. Dave Kammel, BioSystems Engineer, UW-Extension

9:45 am **Designing the Cow of the Future**

Dr. Les Hansen, Professor of Animal Science, Univ of Minnesota Extension

10:30 am **Crossbreeding Experiences**; Mark Opitz, grazier, Mineral Point, WI

Livestock Breakout Sessions

8:00 am **Stocker Grazing**, Larry Smith, DVM and grazier, Vernon County, WI

9:45 am **Grazing Stockers, Heifers and Direct Marketing**

Dick Cates, grazier, Spring Green, WI

11:00 am Farm Tours, **Board Buses** (box lunch provided)

11:30 am Arrive at **Art Thicke dairy farm**, LaCrescent, MN

2:30 pm Arrive at **Vance and Bonnie Haugen dairy farm**, Canton, MN

6:00 pm Arrive at **Midway Hotel** (dinner on your own)

7:00 pm **Networking Social**

DAY 3, Thursday, July 31

FORAGE MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS

8:30 am **Forage Species and Grazing Management**

Dr. Dan Undersander, Extension Forage Agronomist, U of Wisconsin-Extension

9:30 am **Break**

9:45 am **How are Ryegrass and Soft Leaf Fescue Performing?**

Dr. Paul Peterson, Extension Forage Agronomist, U of Minnesota Extension

10:45 am **Complimentary Forage Harvesting Systems and Costs**

Dr. Dan Undersander, Extension Forage Agronomist, U of Wisconsin-Extension

11:45 am Final Comments and Adjournment

For more information or to register call 563-683-6496 or check out the website at www.wisc.edu/cias/uppermidwest Cost is \$75 first person/\$45 second person or \$45 for one-day registrations. Student cost is \$20 for whole conference.

Dairy Manure – A Valuable Resource

Manure is a significant by-product of dairy production. For years it was considered a major liability to be disposed of as cheaply as possible. Over ten years of ISU research and on-farm demonstrations in NE Iowa with manure show that manure can be a valuable resource when the manure is accurately and uniformly spread and the nutrients fully utilized.

Using book values, a 1200# dairy cow in a confinement operation will produce 240# nitrogen, 120# of phosphorous and 240# potassium per year. If properly utilized, each cow would reduce purchased fertilizer inputs \$100 or more. The economic and environmental consequences of mis-application are also well documented. With declining profit margins and increasing environmental concerns, manure utilization is a sustainable strategy.

In recent years ISU Extension has organized end-of-season meetings with on-farm cooperators. Individual plot results are shared and discussed and common concerns identified. Cooperator comments include:

- a) Fields with considerable manure history tend to have elevated phosphorous (P) levels. Soil tests from manure history fields sampled in the Maquoketa River Watershed Project showed that 90% of the fields were testing high (>21ppm P) or

very high (>31ppm P). The average phosphorous soil test level for these fields was 59 ppm. Manure management plans for large confinement operations will be based on P within the next 5 years. A P Index is being developed based on soil test levels, soil conservation factors and proximity to sensitive areas. Long-term research has shown that there is no economic response to P fertilization on soils testing "high" or above (>21 ppm). The potential for P loss in surface runoff increases dramatically as soil test P levels increase.

- b) Optimal crop yields can be obtained with manure alone. Even the exception corn yields in 2002 were obtained with manure alone and/or reduced nitrogen (N) rates at the Northeast Research Farm and in cooperator fields. Over-application of N as fertilizer or manure increases the potential for leaching and water quality problems.
- c) Proper manure application (accurate and uniform) requires a balance of art and science. Nutrient analysis of manure varies by species, storage and application methods, and method of sampling. Most manure application equipment is difficult to calibrate for application rate/ acre and uniformity of application over the spread pattern. Traditional rear delivery equipment spreading bedded manure tends to have the least-uniform spread patterns.
- d) Manure application may be a compromise. If one injects to prevent N loss and odor problems, remaining residue levels may not meet conservation requirements. If we surface broadcast to maintain residue levels and reduce erosion, we will increase N losses and odor complaints.
- e) Manure application equipment is heavy. In some cases, the compaction damage and resultant yield reduction may exceed the nutrient value of the manure.

For additional information and assistance with nutrient management questions, contact your local county Extension office.

By George Cummins, ISU Extension Crop Specialist

"To fully utilize manure nutrients for crop production, it must be spread uniformly and accurately. "

Chairman, mailman—I mean chairperson, mail person—about the only word I can still use the word "man" in is "man"ure. Go figure!

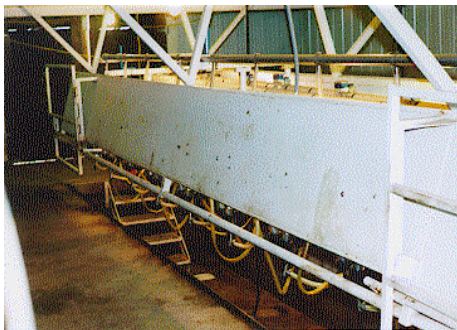
Dairy Parlor Options for Remodeling

In the past few years, the NE Iowa dairy industry has been remodeling stall barns to parlor and freestall operations using many unique ideas to keep costs low to reduce risk balanced relative to cow comfort to improve profits.

Many stall barns, if in good structural condition usually make a low cost conversion to an in-barn pit parlor, holding area and cow handling, maternity pen area. If the parlor is not built in the barn, lean-to's on the side of a barn may also be an option.

However, not all stall barns are created equal. It's important for producers to look long term at remodeling to not sacrifice profits with low-cost remodels.

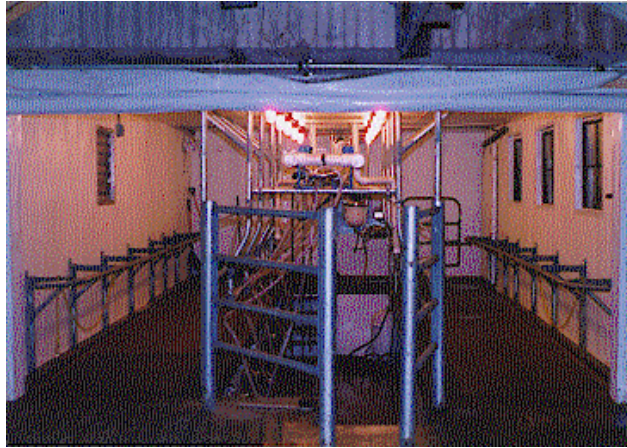
Dairy barns can also be converted to transition cow facilities, freestalls and other uses. Each operation is unique so consider asking your Extension Dairy Field Specialist to visit your farm to consider options.



A Swing 10 with kick rail and splash guard. Indexing is not necessary but can be part if desired by the operator.

How Cheap Can These Be Built in an Existing Barn?

Producers have built Swing 10 parabone parlors for less than



\$10,000 or \$500 per milking stall depending on existing structure, use of existing, used or cheaper materials and incorporating own labor. These parlors need not

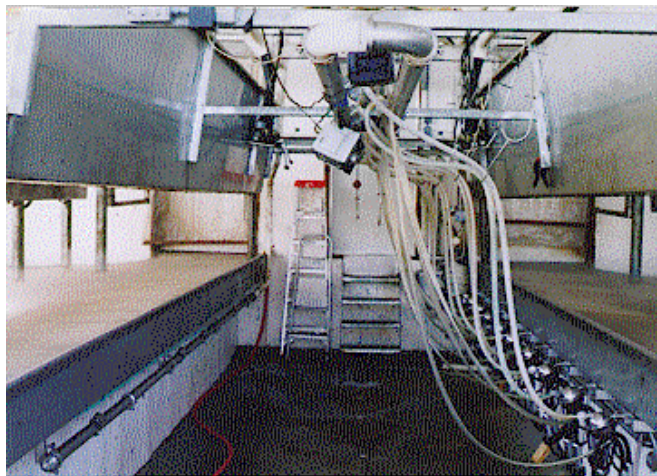
sacrifice throughput and are competitive with other parlor types.

In December of 2001 and March of 2003, producers in NE Iowa were able to view many efficient low cost remodeled parlors. These included many swing and doubled up parallel, parabone and herringbone parlors.

There are many design options available, including many available from your dairy equipment dealer. Before buying, shop around and look what other producers are building to save on both money and "I should of done this instead" issues afterwards.

The photos included here depict some of the simple stall work for 70 degree parlor milking from between the back legs. To see if it may have applicability to your farm, give us a call and let us walk you through options to think about.

Larry Tranel, Dairy Field Specialist, Iowa State University Extension



Placement of manure pan and bottom kick rail is crucial to milker comfort as is pit depth and concave pit design. Design for both cow visibility and milker comfort and safety as neither needs to be sacrificed.

Meeting the Challenges of Day-to-Day Dairy Management

Do you ever have a day at your dairy when you have so much to do and so many “fires to put out” that you feel like you have the weight of a thousand monkeys on your back? This is the scenario that Dr. Jim Bennett, DVM, used to capture the attention of producers, professionals, and ag-business representatives at the Northwest Iowa Dairy Days program, March 5- 7.

Dr. Bennett, a full-time dairy practitioner and dairy consultant presented “Getting Work Done on My Dairy – How Do I Know It is Getting Done Right?” Drawing from his years of experience serving dairy clients and helping them trouble-shoot typical dairy problems, Dr. Bennett proposes that every dairy – whether it has 50 cows or 5000 cows – can benefit from applying basic concepts of organization, goal setting, process description for essential tasks, and simple monitoring-feedback schemes. Here is a key point summary:

1) A dairy should have a structure - Make an Organizational Chart and identify responsibilities of everyone on the chart.

- An organizational chart defines who is the boss and the role/assignment of all people who work at the dairy- both family and non-family employees.
- A chart establishes the flow of communication on the dairy.

- A chart establishes who has what jobs, and helps prevent one person from becoming overloaded with too many “monkeys” – (tasks).

2) A dairy should have a defined set of processes that describe how essential tasks on the dairy will get done.

- Written processes can be simply stated, and could be flow charts, lists, or diagrams. They are dynamic – they can be changed to adjust to changing situations on the dairy.
- Most problems on dairies stem from one of two critical process problems: either the wrong process is being used, or the right process is being performed wrong.
- When the essential processes are performed correctly and consistently by all workers or family members, the desired outcomes of quality milk, healthy cows, and happy employees can be achieved.

3) A dairy should have a set of goals for the dairy in general, and goals for each worker or team.

- A goal defines what people on the dairy are working towards; it defines what they should have as an outcome or product of their work each day.
- Goals should be specific. For example “having a profitable reproductive program” is not a specific goal. Instead, define the reproductive goals specifically as “Average Days Open < 125”, or “Heat Detection Rate >55%”, or “Pregnancy Rate > 19%”.

4) A dairy should set up a simple system to monitor results to be sure that goals are being met, and to be sure to give feedback to the family members or workers so they will know when goals are being met and when they are not being met.

- Once goals are simply stated and posted, set up a simple monitoring system and post it. For example, if one of a dairy’s goals is a SCC of 200,000, this can be monitored by simply posting the daily or weekly herd SCC levels. All family members and workers then have immediate feedback about the progress toward reaching the goal.
- Monitoring progress towards goals gives useful feedback: if goals aren’t met, owner/managers & employees can re-evaluate processes and change processes. If goals are being met, owners and employees have an opportunity to modify processes for ways to meet the goals better (or cheaper).
- Monitoring results allows producers to benchmark against each other and constantly learn about good ways to get things done.

Many dairy producers and business people commented that Dr. Bennett’s presentation made good sense and could be applied to just about any business or organization. If you would like to obtain a copy of the Dr. Bennett’s presentation and the NW Iowa Dairy Days Proceedings, contact the Sioux County Extension Office, 712-737-4230, or Chris Mondak at cmondak@iastate.edu.

by Chris Mondak, ISU Extension Dairy specialist, Northwest Iowa

Alfalfa PEAQ Update

One of the most important decisions you make on your dairy each year is when to cut first crop alfalfa. Over the past several years, ISU Extension has teamed up with several dairy producers and consultants to use the PEAQ measurements to depict when to cut alfalfa.

First crop is famous for dropping quality quickly. Many try to balance the yield versus quality issue and usually get caught as quality begins to drop as harvest so often gets delayed due to rains. It is important to realize that as yield increases beyond a good bud stage, most of the additional yield is lignin, an undigestible part of the plant.

Thus, even though total forage yield is more, yield of digestible forage may not be and yet producers pay the additional costs of harvesting the additional undigestible dry matter. In addition, the dairy cows need to waste energy trying to digest the forage if beyond their fiber needs.

How to Use PEAQ

Once the forage is in the bud stage at 24"- 26" in height (tallest stem in a 2' square) its relative feed value is between 181 and 172. Once it gets taller than 27" at 168 Relative Feed Value (RFV), it becomes more difficult to get the forage into storage at 150 RFV as 15-25 RFV points are lost during harvest. For more information on PEAQ measurements request ISU fact sheet LT-111.

Youth and Family Focus

Farm Couple Getaways—What Did We Learn?

100% of the participants rated the workshop as "Excellent" or "Very Good." Twelve individuals said what they most liked about the program was "talking and listening to other people, sharing problems." Others liked "the interaction we had with farm issues affecting the group and bouncing ideas off one another," "meeting other couples who had similar issues," "learned tools to help communicate and to problem solve," and "understanding personality styles and differences." Sample comments from participants indicated what they gained from the Getaway:

- * "More resources that we can pull from in order to get through problems."
- * "How important our family is and our mental health."
- * "I realize I need to communicate and listen better."
- * "Knowledge on what's out there, as farm families we all have some problems."
- * "Opened my eyes to see his point of view better."
- * "You need good communication in a family to thrive."

"I really enjoyed the personality assessments. They were a blast and I now understand why my spouse has been doing so many things a certain way for the last 20 years." --a 1998 participant in Wisconsin

Participants also indicated what they plan to do or change as a result:

- * "Listen better."
- * "Keep working on the problem that we have and get it solved."
- * "The lack of quality time I spend with my wife."
- * "Work even harder to achieve what I see as most important quality family time."
- * "Try to communicate better with my spouse."
- * "My communication with wife and kids."
- * "Attitude and awareness of stress problems."
- * "...use tools to help spouse understand my thoughts, feelings and will work harder to understand him."
- * "My communication skills with wife."
- * "Spend more time with my husband."
- * "Work on communication" - 3 responses
- * "Set goals, get more organized."
- * "I plan to communicate our children's roles and jobs out more specifically."
- * "My way of communicating - by using new tools and foster my marriage to a farmer."

Dairy Heifer Prices Unlikely to Change

During 2000, 2001 and part of 2002, dairy replacement heifer prices were very high. A large number of dairy expansions and high milk prices, during part of that time, were largely responsible. Another part of the reason are high culling rates on some dairy farms, 37% or more annually, relative to the number of heifers available. Not long ago, the ratio of dairy heifers per 100 cows was 41.

The dairy heifer ratio on 1 January 2003 was 44.8 per 100 cows, a record. High Heifer prices encouraged dairy producers to improve calf livability and heifer raising practices. High heifer prices and approximately 18 months of very low milk prices has forced dairy owners and managers to re-think the concept of 'throw-away cows.' What do I mean by 'throw-away cows?'

Dairy heifers were, a few years ago, cheap relative their income potential. The low prices encouraged some dairy owners to get cows to milk as

hard as possible, as long as possible and not be re-bred. This often meant dairies didn't focus on those aspects of dairy herd management that promoted cow live-ability. After all, cows weren't going to be around long enough to see the impacts of this management scheme.

Large herds have begun to re-think that strategy. At the recent Western Dairy Management Conference, discussions were held that indicated this. Doug Maddox remarked that he is aware of the positive impact of a 20% improvement in heifer raising for his operation, \$1 million annually. He also remarked about the concept of 'throwaway cows' and how much it costs some dairies.

Dairy farms have responded to the economic incentives they saw in the last few years. The financial damage that has been done during the most recent low milk price time and the large dairy replacement herd will leave little reason for dairy heifers to rise. Heifer raisers and commercial heifer sellers can have some tough times in the future. But there are two major factors that influence costs for heifers. Feed and labor costs.

Feed for baby calves is very important because of the high cost of the milk replacers often used. Keeping calves alive through good management, appropriate housing, ventilation and good husbandry improves the cost per calf raised. The next high cost period for heifer raising is when heifers are bred. Here labor costs for vaccination, heat detection and artificial insemination are high. It may be useful to use a heat synchronization program to reduce the labor costs. The last high cost area of heifer growth is late in gestation or as heifers springup or older short bred. Here, heifers consume larger amounts of feed. Being certain heifers are bred to calve on time, 24 months of age, will reduce the number of days feeding these larger heifers.

The above management tips will help reduce the cost of raising heifers and improving the bottom line of commercial heifer growers and sellers. But they can also be useful for dairy producers raising their own heifers as well.

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Iowa State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

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