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Low Somatic Cell Counts…

The January 10, 2006 issue of HOARD'S DAIRYMAN contained a short article about the National Dairy Quality Award winners. The six families who were the Platinum winners participated in a roundtable discussion describing how they maintained high milk quality. While all the farms in this category were outstanding, the Merrymead Farm (Rothenberger Family of Montgomery County, PA) had the unique distinction of having the lowest DHI Somatic Cell Count (SCC) average (39,500), along with the highest RHA (28,303 lbs/year) of all six farms. The SCCs for the year for all six herds were excellent, showing the following averages: 86,000, 82,750, 81,000, 55,000, 53,000 and 39,500. Standard plate count averages were extremely low, indicating that the milk was very clean and of high quality. Although all these herds had many differences in their management, a few "secrets of success" seemed to be common in all the herds.

- All had strict udder preparation protocols that were [clearly] understood and followed by everyone. They all pre-dipped and fore-stripped the cows prior to unit attachment. All but one of the farms had written protocols, even the farm with just two milkers (and these two were not necessarily the same individuals each time).
- The barn environment was carefully maintained to keep cows comfortable and clean. Stalls were manicured 2-3 times each day, using all sorts of bedding. The key seemed to be a proactive concern for animal hygiene and comfort.
- Teat end health was important and monitored carefully. The equipment was serviced regularly and maintained in good working order. Unit attachment and detachment was closely supervised, and the units were not put on the cows before they (the cows) were ready… and removed as soon as the cows finished milking.
- All of these farms employed similar methods of detecting mastitis early in the infectious process, using CMT paddles, DHI SCC reports, attention to the cow and her udder at prep time, and careful observation during fore-stripping to detect any mastitis or other possible concerns.
- These six dairies screened cows carefully as they entered the milking string. They used strip cups, CMT, DHI data, and cultures as needed to identify potential problems prior to fresh cows and heifers entering the lactating herd. All cases of mastitis in early fresh cows were treated appropriately and aggressively, as directed by their dairy team and veterinarians.

In the final analysis, did these dairies really have "secrets" to high quality milk? No doubt every dairy owner or worker has at some time heard these same "secrets" before in one way or another. Obtaining high quality milk is really no secret. It is doing the little things right every day and with every cow. Animal hygiene and comfort, attention to detail in the parlor, and finding infections and appropriately treating them quickly could help every dairy to produce higher quality milk. Less mastitis makes a lot of economic sense. Reducing losses from therapeutics, lost milk, mastitis culls and lower milk premiums are all potentially high profit items for the dairy producer. Fewer infections and better cow comfort make us better stewards of the animals under our care. Producing products of the highest quality, while using therapeutics in the most judicious manner creates products that consumers desire. Employing these "secrets" will help all members of our dairy industry.

(edited from an article by *Dr. David Wolfgang, PSU Extension Veterinarian*

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Moving your dairy forward…

Changes are constantly taking place in today's world and are something that most people do not enjoy facing. However, the more change we embrace, the more a producer can ask the question, "How can I do better at this?" By asking this, a producer will survive and thrive in the future. This involves setting goals and evaluating progress. Here are a few tips on setting goals and moving your dairy forward:

1. Consider 2 or 3 problems that if solved would make the most positive difference to your farm operation by the end of 2006… and over the next 3 to 5 years.
2. Goals should be specific and measurable (like reducing SSC from 350,000 to 275,000. Goals should be written down, providing a record for review and evaluation, which is also critical to long term success.
3. Include input from all members of the team – everyone involved with the operation. This can lead to greater enthusiasm and commitment to their assigned responsibilities. When team members are actively involved they take more ownership in the outcome of goals, along with potential results and successes.
4. Develop a plan of action for each goal. Remember, it is the little things every day, which at the end of the year will make a big difference! Determine exactly who, what, when, where, and how activities will take place in order to accomplish each goal. Prioritize tasks and set a timeline for achievement.

A good attitude and a positive approach can make a big difference to achieving each goal. It starts today.

(edited from an article by Neal Broadwater, Un of MN Dairy Extension)

Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Looking for research-tested corn hybrids for the coming year? Call me! My goal is to help you. That's Renaissance's commitment to you!

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RENAISSANCE… ***HELPING TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY & PROFITABILITY!***

Springtime!

In order to maximize yield, it is important that corn is planted prior to the end of the optimum planting time for each climatic zone. The optimum planting period for any area is the range of dates that provides the best combination of moisture, soil and air temperature, along with the quality of seed to be planted and its average days to maturity (RM). The optimum planting range for corn is approximately 2 to 3 weeks. Planting after this optimum time will usually result in lower yields, with many studies showing a rate of approximately ½% loss in yield potential per day following a delay in planting. The longer the delay in planting the greater the decline in possible yield rates and in the speed of decline. I will be happy to work with you to determine the optimum planting time(s) for our area – and to help you make the most of this year's crops!

WHAT ARE YOUR COWS TELLING YOU? There has been a lot of attention in recent years to "cow ergonomics"… and the impact that cow comfort has on productivity and profitability. Regardless of whether you are working in an existing facility or planning to build a new one, it is important to consider the working and living environment of your livestock. The more comfortable the cows are, the better they will perform – giving you less culls, more milk and better health. It's that simple. Areas of consideration include stall design – made to "fit" the cow's normal resting position, rising motions and lying movements; sufficient daylight and/or artificial lighting; good ventilation year-round; the type and amount of bedding used; providing fresh, clean water at all times; regular maintenance or cleaning of waterers, feed bunks, and the entire barn; ensuring adequately sized and ventilated holding areas; developing udder preparation and management protocols; etc. And don't forget your calves, heifers and dry cows! Cow comfort is important to your entire herd and to your bottom line. It is also helpful to plan ahead for the coming heat and humidity of summer! Being prepared will make a positive difference this summer.

A POINT TO PONDER... Spring is here! Schedules around the farm are getting busier, as efforts are made to plow and plant. Soon it will be time to start making hay ~ and the cycle of time moves forward. It's easy to get caught up in the demands of work, activities and life in general, as the hectic pace seems to suck us in on many fronts. Make sure you take time to prioritize your life and your activities. It is important to maintain a healthy perspective and a clear focus, which impacts your overall well-being. One cannot place enough emphasis on faith and family, followed by the myriad of things that consume so much of our time. Remember ~ good perspective and clear focus will make a difference!

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April showers…

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