

DAIRY PIPELINE

Corn silage. For many dairymen, this year's corn crop was challenging. Making milk from it may be an even greater challenge. One of the most important steps in producing quality corn silage is harvesting at the proper time. The combination of a cool, wet spring, which delayed planting and slowed growth, an early frost, and a hurricane, resulted in very poor harvest conditions. As a result, many dairymen made corn silage with frosted corn. The feeding value of silage made from frosted corn depends partly on its maturity at harvest. For some producers, it's business as usual; but for others the effect has already been felt in the bulk tank. In these cases, frequent testing of the silage is the key to survival. Dry matter, energy, protein, fiber, and digestibility vary greatly depending on the degree of maturity in which the corn silage was harvested. The early frost may have forced the harvesting of immature corn for silage. The quality of this silage depends on just how immature the corn was. Very immature corn may have slightly higher fiber and protein and slightly lower energy and digestibility than more mature corn silage. However, if only slightly immature, it may test close to normal for energy, protein, and fiber levels with a slightly higher digestibility than "normal" corn silage. Corn harvested too dry may cause palatability problems compounded by low NDF digestibility.

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Understanding the new traits in Net Merit.

This past August, USDA added three traits, daughter pregnancy rate, service sire calving difficulty, and daughter calving difficulty, to Net Merit. Only service sire calving difficulty had been available to producers before the August

2003 proofs. Here is some basic information about the new traits.

Daughter pregnancy rate or DPR is calculated from days open, a trait estimated by subtracting 280 days from any calving interval in the USDA files. Cows need two calving dates to have a calving interval, so cows all the way back to the 1960 origins of USDA files contribute to DPR evaluations. Proofs for days open are expressed as pregnancy rates, which measure the probability that a cow will become pregnant in a 21-day heat cycle. Bull proofs for DPR are not greatly different from bull to bull, as the standard deviation of true transmitting abilities for DPR is about 1.4%. DPR averages -0.2% for active AI bulls in the November 2003 proofs. Bulls with higher proofs, like +1.5 or +2.0 for DPR, are expected to sire daughters with greater fertility (higher pregnancy rates) than bulls with lower proofs. DPR gets a relative weight of +7% in Net Merit, and is expected to improve very slowly, about 1 % per decade, through selection on Net Merit. This is the first trait published by USDA to improve fertility through selection.

Service sire calving ease (SCE) and daughter calving ease (DCE) measure the ability of a first calf heifer to deliver the offspring of a bull (SCE) or the ability of a daughter of a bull to give birth to her first calf (DCE). SCE has been used for years to choose "easy calving" bulls as mates for heifers. Daughters of "easy calving" bulls may not be the best at delivery of their own calves, however. DCE identifies bulls whose daughters give birth easily. Genetic evaluations for SCE or DCE are based on producer scores of 1 to 5 for increasingly difficult births, and the data are usually reported through DHI. Both traits get a negative emphasis of -2% in Net Merit, with expected declines in percent difficult births in heifers of -1.3% for SCE and -1.6% for DCE per decade through selection on Net Merit.

DCE is the first trait available to producers from USDA to actually select against difficult births as a trait of the female.

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**** Upcoming Activities****

Area Dairy Conferences (2003)

Marion (Southwest Virginia) Dec. 9
Farm Bureau Building in Marion
contact Andy Overbay
(276)223-6040 or email: aoverbay@vt.edu

Rocky Mount Dec. 10
Waitsboro Ruritan Club
contact Sue Puffenbarger
(540) 483-5161 or email: smp@vt.edu

Harrisonburg (Valley) Dec. 11
Rockingham Ext. Office (Conference Room)
contact Alan Grove or Tina Horn
(540) 564-3080 or (540) 245-5750
email: agrove@vt.edu or tihorn@vt.edu

Farmville Dec. 17
Prince Edward County Ext. Office (Conference Room) on Rt. 15
contact J. B. Daniels
(804)561-2481 or email: jadanie2@vt.edu

Culpeper Dec. 18
Contact Alan Grove
Remington Lions Club, on Rt. 29
(540) 564-3080 email: agrove@vt.edu

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