

Dairy Pipeline

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Department of Dairy Science

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Getting Ready for Cooler Weather

As hot and dry as it has been this season, it is hard to imagine even thinking about winterizing the farm as of yet; however, this is exactly the time to begin to prepare for “old Jack Frost.” *Careful considerations and proactive stances can really pay dividends in this time of escalating input costs.*

First, think about the milking herd; cold weather means more confinement, so we need to be making plans for singeing hair and keeping tails clean during this time. Having adequate bedding supplies on hand is a must this time of year, as many materials become short as suppliers burn them for heating needs. Increased time in the barn calls for good ventilation. Is air flow changing the air in the barn or merely mixing it inside the facility?

Dry cows, heifers and young stock are always a challenge due to resources available on the farm. “Clean and dry” are the two inescapable terms to remember when winterizing these groups. It may sound crazy to talk about mud during a drought, but my experience has been that pathogen explosions generally follow times of hot, dry weather. As soon as the moisture comes back, disease and illness follow right behind. Fall always brings tremendous temperature swings and the ensuing problems with diseases like pneumonia are well documented. Daily (or more often) inspection of all animals on the farm is critical for prevention of animal losses during this time of transition,

Equipment and facilities cannot be overlooked for winterization. Again the hot, dry weather recently makes oil changes more necessary so by all means don't neglect this important step. Clean or replace air filters, replace fuel filters and lubricate bearings and joints to maximize the life and efficiency of your machinery. Remember too that antifreeze, like engine oil, has a lifespan. Merely adding more coolant may not be enough to fully protect your investment.

Barn equipment follows those same lines. Clean and check vacuum lines, maintain vacuum regulators and check liners and hoses regularly,

replacing as needed. Remove all weeds and clutter from barn exterior walls. Such places create excellent places for rodents and other unwanted visitors to hide as they come in from the cold!

--Andy Overbay

Dairy Extension Agent,

Southwest Virginia

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VTDAIRY: The new Dairy Extension web site.

In September we launched the new platform for presenting our extension programs over the internet. The URL where it can be accessed is www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu. *We will keep updated statistics on the number of cows in the U. S. and Virginia, number of Grade A dairy herds in Virginia by county, number of DHI farms and cow numbers, and the most recent mailbox price of milk for the area. Also new events from Virginia Tech will be posted that are of interest to the Virginia dairy industry.*

Active program areas where information can be found are Animal ID, Environmental Stewardship, Farm Business Management and Marketing, Forage Testing, Genetics, Nutrition and Forage Quality, and Youth. Contact information will be provided for extension agents and specialists as well as state and federal agencies and other allied groups. Links to past issues of the Dairy Pipeline, Dairy Guidelines, Area Dairy Conference Proceedings, and Feed and Nutritional Management Cow College Proceedings can be found at this site. Finally there is an interactive section that will give us another way of communicating.

If you have internet access we hope you will visit us at this site and bookmark it for future use. The site will not stay constant and will be dynamic, changing as new technology allows different ways of communicating.

--Charles C. Stallings

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“My best cow was by a herd bull.”

I have heard this comment from a number of dairy producers through the years and there actually is a sound genetic principal behind it. This isn't the most quantitative evaluation that could be made. It is usually a subjective recollection of an older cow or two that left a favorable impression on the owner. It wouldn't hurt to recall how many half sisters to those cows had been culled years earlier for one reason or another. However, the comment is about “my best cow”, not “the best group of cows any bull ever left in my herd.” The sound genetic principal comes from selection intensity. A lot of producers use too many different AI bulls, with only enough semen on any one AI bull to produce a few daughters. A herd bull, on the other hand, may breed 30 to 40 heifers a season plus some clean-up duty in the milking herd. Such bulls may produce 20 to 30 daughters in a 150 cow herd. Let's not be too distracted by the decision to make greater use of bulls about which much less is known. The best individual cow out of a group of 30 is almost certain to be at least competitive with, if not better than the best cow out of a group of five daughters of even the top AI bulls. Bulls should be evaluated on the AVERAGE merit of their progeny, not by a subjective evaluation of their best single daughter in one herd. Every daughter a bull leaves in a herd generates income and expenses. ***The research on this topic is conclusive: daughters of good AI bulls leave the bank account in better shape than daughters of herd bulls.*** A 2002 study in the Journal of Dairy Science (JDS 85:3492-3502) showed that average daughters of proven AI bulls generated \$148 per cow more lifetime net income than average daughters of non-AI bulls under fluid milk market conditions. That's dollars left over after all the bills and receipts – feed, rearing, health, breeding, culling and production – were considered. The “best” cow in a dairy farmer's herd may have been a daughter of a herd bull, but for the vast majority of herds, the best groups of cows were sired by AI bulls.

--Bennet Cassell
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Upcoming Activities

- Recruiting Day, Virginia Tech.** October 15
Litton Reaves Hall
- Area Dairy Conferences:**
 - Rocky Mount** December 6
Registration Contact: Sue Puffenbarger
(540) 483-5161 or smp@vt.edu
 - Blackstone** December 8
Registration Contact: Sue Puffenbarger
(540) 483-5161 or smp@vt.edu
 - Marion Farm Bureau.** December 12
Registration Contact: Andy Overbay
(276) 223-6040 or aoverbay@vt.edu
 - Brandy Station Fire Hall** December 15
Registration Contact: Alan Grove
(540) 564-3080 or agrove@vt.edu
 - Ever's Restaurant.** December 16
Registration Contacts:
Tina Horn (540) 245-5750 or tihorn@vt.edu
or
Alan Grove (540) 564-3080 or agrove@vt.edu

If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.

Bennet Cassell
Bennet G. Cassell
Dairy Extension Coordinator
and Extension Dairy Scientist,
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