

## Dairy Pipeline

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### Department of Dairy Science

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### Update on the Precision Phosphorus Feeding Incentive Trial

A few weeks ago we announced an innovative program designed to monitor phosphorus intakes on Virginia herds. If herds are within 105% of the 2001 National Research Council's recommendations a payment of \$12 per cow can be received at the end of the each of two years. If herds are 115% or less a \$6 per cow payment is possible up to a maximum of 400 cows. We sent a survey out in October to all Grade A herds in Virginia and gathered information on feeding and management. We also asked about the desire to participate in this program.

We have received approximately 300 surveys back with 200 expressing an interest in the program. These herds are currently being contacted to determine participation in the project. ***Herds selected will receive, in addition to the cash payments, free feed testing every other month for a three year period.***

We will have room for further herds to participate after this first group is selected. Another mailing of the survey to herds that did not respond to the first will be made in December. Details of the program can be obtained on our Dairy Extension web site at the following location: [www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu](http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu).

Funds for support of this project come from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

--Charles C. Stallings  
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### Organic Dairying Comes to the Valley

There has been a lot of talk about organic food production in the news recently. During the first week of November one dairy in the Shenandoah Valley became the first to produce organically certified milk. To produce organically certified milk requires the producer to maintain accurate

records and takes about four years. The first step is to have your farm land certified. This procedure requires three years with no commercial fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides or genetically modified seeds on the land. At the end of three years the producer will have his farm and records inspected by a certifying agency. Once the farm land is certified it takes another twelve months to certify the cattle. No hormones or antibiotics can be used on the cattle (vaccines and biologics are okay), and current regulations require a minimum of 80% organic feed be fed the first nine months of transition, and 100% organic feed the last three months of transition. Cattle must also have access to pasture.

So what is in organic dairying for the farmer? Several possible rewards include higher milk prices, less cost for fertilizer and chemical inputs; fewer vet bills, healthier work environment, and more profits from the sale of organic heifers. Since most organic dairies are grazing operations, they can also expect more lactations per cow, and less overhead costs for equipment.

***So, is organic the way to go? Just like any change in your farming operation you must weigh the positives and negatives and make a decision based on your farms' strengths and weaknesses.*** At this time the market for organic dairy products is growing rapidly and the pay price is up to \$26.00/cwt. (hauling included), with another \$2-3.00 in quality incentives available. However, organically certified feed will cost more.

By this time next year there may be six or seven more dairies producing organically certified milk in the Shenandoah Valley and perhaps then we can determine the profitability of this relatively new market.

--Alan Grove  
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## Two Kinds of Fertility Evaluations

There are two kinds of statistical evaluations of fertility available to dairy farmers. One of these, daughter pregnancy rate or DPR is a genetic evaluation. It measures the expected genetic difference between *daughters of bulls* in the likelihood of a pregnancy to any given insemination. A bull with a DPR of +2 is expected to produce average daughters with a 2-point higher pregnancy rate than the average daughter of a bull with a DPR of 0. DPR is a selection tool that should be used to improve the genetic merit of future generations for fertility.

The second statistical measure of fertility, Estimated Relative Conception Rate or ERCR, measures the likelihood (relative to other bulls) of a *cow not returning to heat* within 70 days following insemination with semen from the bull for which the ERCR was calculated. Thus, a bull with an ERCR of +2 has a 2 percentage point higher expectation of producing a pregnancy than a bull with an ERCR of 0. ERCR's are published by DRMS Raleigh in May and November of each year.

The latest ERCR's are available on the DRMS web site (<http://www.drms.org/>) or on the sire summaries available on VT Dairy (<http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu/>) as well as on other sire lists. The table below will help interpret ERCR's in Holsteins and Jerseys.

### Distribution of November 2005 ERCR's on Holstein and Jersey bulls.

ERCR rating	Number of active AI bulls	
	Holsteins	Jerseys
3 or higher	33	9
1 or 2	114	14
0	60	5
-1 or -2	76	8
-3 or lower	17	7

Bulls with ERCR ratings of plus or minus 3 are outliers. There aren't very many of them. Bulls in the +1 or +2 category are more widely available. I classify ERCR ratings of +1 as "fertile" and +2 or more as "highly fertile". There are lots of opportunities to use bulls with lower ERCR ratings

in well run breeding programs, though "informed use" is an important concept.

ERCR's should be one consideration when buying semen, along with price, genetic merit, and other factors. ***Remember that cows and heifers must be healthy, in heat, and bred with properly handled semen correctly placed in the reproductive tract at the right time for conception to occur.***

--Bennet Cassell

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## Upcoming Activities

### Area Dairy Conferences:

**Rocky Mount** . . . . . December 6

#### Waitsboro Ruritan Club

Registration Contact: Sue Puffenbarger

(540) 483-5161 or [smp@vt.edu](mailto:smp@vt.edu)

**Blackstone** . . . . . December 8

#### AREC Center

Registration Contact: Sue Puffenbarger

(540) 483-5161 or [smp@vt.edu](mailto:smp@vt.edu)

**Marion Farm Bureau** . . . . . December 12

Registration Contact: Smyth County Extension Office  
by Dec. 1, 2005 at 4 p.m. (276) 783-5175

or

Andy Overbay (276) 223-6040 or [aoverbay@vt.edu](mailto:aoverbay@vt.edu)

**Brandy Station Fire Hall** . . . . . December 15

Registration Contact: Alan Grove

(540) 564-3080 or [agrove@vt.edu](mailto:agrove@vt.edu)

**Ever's Restaurant** . . . . . December 16

#### Harrisonburg

Registration Contacts:

Tina Horn (540) 245-5750 or [tihorn@vt.edu](mailto:tihorn@vt.edu)

or

Alan Grove (540) 564-3080 or [agrove@vt.edu](mailto: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 G. Cassell

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