

DAIRY PIPELINE

Pregnancy rate as the benchmark for evaluating reproductive performance.

Reproductive performance is a function of certain management policies and how well these policies are implemented in the day-to-day management of the herd. It has long been known that there is an important economic advantage to be gained by efficient reproduction in dairy herds. Throughout her herd life, a cow should calve without difficulty, experience little or no postpartum reproductive disease, breed back within an optimal time period, carries each fetus to term, and have a live birth. The ability to use records effectively is one of the cornerstones of reproductive management. Complete and accurate herd records should provide the tools necessary to define past herd performance, assist in establishing goals for the benchmarks being evaluated, and allow monitoring to determine the impact of the plan developed to reach an established goal. The first step in record analysis is to identify key benchmarks that reflect components of reproductive performance that affect the desired outcome or goal. In fact, on many farms data overload is the problem where too much information is available and decisions must be made on what parameters are really important and useful.

- There are many ways to measure performance – comparison against standards proposed by an expert, comparison against past performance or comparison against others.
- Pregnancy rate can be defined as the percentage of cows eligible to become pregnant, in a given time frame that actually do become pregnant. Usually the time frame used to calculate pregnancy rate is 21 days.
- Pregnancy rate is the reproductive performance benchmark that incorporates service rate and conception rate in a timely fashion and

should be the cornerstone of performance evaluation.

- The average pregnancy rate for DHI herds is 14%. Herds in the top 10% average 20% and the best herds average 24%.
- Pregnancy rate calculates how “fast” cows get pregnant past the voluntary waiting period. Efficient reproductive performance is critical for maintenance of a fresh herd and higher daily milk yield. Pregnancy rate is now being reported on the DHI-202 Herd Summary Sheet and should be used as the benchmark to evaluate reproductive performance.

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Byproduct feeds in dairy rations. There are a variety of byproduct feeds available in Virginia and a variety of reasons why dairymen may want to incorporate them into the diets fed to cows or replacement heifers. Byproducts are typically used to combat low quality and/or low quantities of home grown forages and in some cases are used to improve rations containing low fiber, highly digestible feeds. Byproducts can be utilized as a protein, energy, or fiber source, but most often are used to stretch forages. The past few growing seasons have resulted in greater interest in these feed sources. Depending on location, dairy farmers can be dealing with shortages of corn silage, small grain silage and/or hay. Weather conditions during corn silage harvest in 2003 not only affected tonnage, but also quality and palatability in some areas. Byproduct feeds may also be a way to help keep the protein up in rations without “breaking the bank.” When determining whether to purchase and feed a certain byproduct, several things should be considered:

- Is this feed economical? Will this feed increase production and/or reduce feed costs enough to pay for the additional cost? Is it an economical source of fat, fiber, protein, or energy to compliment forages being fed?
- Can I effectively manage this feed? Do I have a way of incorporating it into my ration? Do I have adequate storage? Can I use this feed up in the recommended amount of time (an important consideration when dealing with wet byproducts)?
- Is the byproduct available year-round, or is it seasonal?
- Is this product palatable and easy to transition cows onto and off of?
- Are there any other costs associated with feeding this product, and if so, is it still economical to use?

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**** Upcoming Activities****

2004 Hokie Cow Classic Golf Tournament at New Championship River Course, <i>Radford</i>	May 27
2004 Southeast Dairy Youth Retreat <i>Virginia Tech</i>	July 13-16
Grand Opening of the Virginia Tech Dairy, Complex, <i>Virginia Tech</i>	July 16

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