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DAIRY PIPELINE

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"Herd efficiency suffers by keeping marginal cows and more importantly, by stressing the productive members of the herd."

"It's important to know where you've been before planning the next step."

Fill the Stall Space with Productive Cows

The rational response to favorable milk prices is to increase production, by whatever means are available. One method is to cull less, calve in all available replacements, and maybe buy a few from the neighbors to expand cow numbers. This strategy is almost never accompanied by construction of more stall or bunk space or extra attention to udder health and reproduction. The goal is more milk in the bulk tank and management satisfied with a victory, but some other things happen as well.

The herd will include more old or young or marginal cows and a lower percentage of the most profitable cows in their prime years. Productive cows have less access to the feed, water, and resting space and become less productive in the process. Some may incur permanent damage or not breed back, thus shortening their useful years. The young and timid or infirm struggle to compete in crowded conditions. Longevity of a year's worth of heifers may be compromised. Be especially careful about overstocking this year.

Milk prices are favorable, but feed prices are not. Stored forages are in short supply in many areas. This is a good year to think about effective use of available feed and barn space resources as well as total milk shipped. Come to think of it, last year was a good year to do the same thing and I'll just bet next year will also be a good year not to overstock the farm.

Several years back, a number of Virginia dairymen contracted to reduce production through a government sponsored herd buydown. Cow numbers were reduced by culling marginal cows. The surprising result in a number of herds was that the contracted reduction in milk yield was hard to achieve. Fewer cows meant that the productive cows that remained in these herds prospered and responded with higher yields. Herd efficiency suffers by keeping marginal cows and more importantly, by stressing the productive members of the herd. Almost certainly, some cows retained to make the extra milk simply don't produce enough for the feed and space they consume and the pressure they put on more productive cows. If expansion is a good idea, do it, but do so with cow health and comfort as a primary goal. Otherwise, keep the productive cows and take good care of them.

—Bennet Cassell
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Make it a Year to Remember

Year's end is typically when most people take a moment to reflect on the happenings of the past 12 months. Local and national news sources alike feature flashbacks of the most noteworthy news events, while friends and family congregate to celebrate the holidays and reminisce. Why not use this time to also reflect on your operation? The timing is ideal. For starters, the hustle and bustle of planting and harvesting crops has temporarily come to a halt. Most people are also reviewing yearly expenditures and making any last minute purchases for tax deductions. Admittedly it's a busy time of year; however, while you're in paperwork mode, why not spend a few extra minutes to reevaluate priorities?

What types of information might you examine? First, while you're planning seed purchases for the upcoming year think about the sufficiency of forage acreages planted the previous year. If you made any herd expansions, make sure you plan your forage program accordingly. In all likelihood you are already doing this. Research data from corn plots in Virginia are also available highlighting not only yields, but calculated milk production based on silage analyses. Contact your local extension agent to

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Upcoming Activities

Dec 13: Pesticide Recertification Meeting 9:00—12:00 a.m. contact Beverly Cox for details (540) 483-5161.

Dec 17: Pesticide Recertification Meeting 6:00—9:00 p.m. contact Beverly Cox for details (540) 483-5161.

Feb 14: Dairy Management Institute Workshop contact Beverly Cox for details (540) 483-5161.

Feb 20—22: 62nd Annual Convention—VA State Feed Association and Nutritional Management "Cow" College—The Inn at VA Tech see www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu for details or contact Bob James at (540) 231-4770.

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.

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For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VT Dairy—Home of the Dairy Extension Program on the web at: www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu.

Bennet Cassell

Bennet G. Cassell
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obtain these data before placing your corn orders for next year. Think about your pest management program as well. How effective where the products you used this year? Are there other products available that may perform better?

On the cow side, this is a good time to review records for new trends. Time has a way of masking the severity of problems by slowly creating a new "normal". For instance, somatic cell counts one month rise from 200,000 to 220,000. You're not pleased with this, but it's not a major crisis; there are other more pressing issues at the time so you let it go. The next month they climb a little more. Slowly you're acclimated to higher SCC and over the course of several months your new average may become 300,000. Without reviewing your records over a longer period of time (for instance 12 months) these trends may be easy to overlook. Graphs are a great way to quickly depict what may be worrisome trends. On the other hand, they can also affirm areas where positive progress is being made. These graphs can indicate the success of changes implemented during the last year. Dairy Metrics, provided through DRMS, is a quick way to view some of these graphs and pinpoint management areas that warrant more attention. For the more competitive types, Dairy Metrics will also allow you to compare your farm to other individual farms or groups of farms. For instance, you could select to be compared to herds of the same size, herds with a rolling herd average over a certain limit, those with low days open, and the list goes on and on. Any farm on test with DHIA has access to this program. With a herdcode and rac number in hand these data can be easily accessed. On-farm milk recording systems such as AfiMilk or Dairy Plan also contain lots of data that can be useful if utilized. Your area dairy extension agents or dairy specialists are happy to provide assistance in finding and analyzing production records.

It's important to know where you've been before planning the next step. As mundane as records analysis can be, it has a place in helping guide the future. Investing a little time now can give focus to your goals and accelerate progress.

—Beverly Cox,
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The Truth about *Staph. aureus*

Staphylococcus aureus is a contagious type of bacteria that can spread from cow to cow at the time of milking. Infected cows will have a chronically high somatic cell count—many of which will be 'millionaires'. To make matters worse, it is very difficult to get rid of these bacteria with antibiotic treatment. Therefore, we have to turn our attention to prevention.

Some basic principles of milking hygiene need to be emphasized. Gloves are crucial, and that means clean ones! *Staph. aureus* can colonize on our hands and wearing gloves will help stop the transmission from humans to cows. If you have a known *Staph. aureus* cow, change your gloves or spray them off with iodine after you prep her. This will help in preventing the spread of the bacteria from one cow to the next. Another key factor to remember is the importance of single-use towels. If we use a towel on a *Staph. aureus* infected cow and then use that same towel on the next cow in the parlor, we have exposed the second cow to the bacteria that is present on the cloth.

After milking, there is a residue of milk left in the unit. The next cow to be milked with that unit may be exposed to bacteria present in that residue. We do not recommend washing the units out because that can cause more harm than good. However, we do suggest the use of an approved post-milking teat dip to help prevent new infections.

Aside from milking-time hygiene, we must also remember calf management. Baby calves fed milk containing *Staph. aureus* can harbor those bacteria until they calve as two year olds, at which point it can show up as mastitis. Therefore, if you have identified a *Staph. aureus* infected cow, do not feed her colostrum to any calf. This also goes for waste milk as it can harbor all kinds of bacteria and feeding it can infect baby calves with *Staph. aureus*.

Our heifers are our future, so we want to ensure their health. The milk lost from an increase in somatic cell count due to *Staph. aureus* is tremendous. Therefore, focusing our attention on the prevention of these infections is crucial.

—Christina Petersson-Wolfe, Extension Dairy Scientist,
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