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DAIRY PIPELINE

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"Excessive culling of cows for reproductive reasons can lead to good-looking reproductive records while actual reproductive performance is in need of improvement."

Photo courtesy of Flickr.com

Strategies for Improving Reproductive Performance: Conception rate—(Part three of four)

It is no secret that the conception rate continues to decline on dairy farms. At one time the goal for conception rate was >50%. Over time that goal fell to >40% and now herds that utilize total AI are getting 25%-35% of their cows pregnant from each service. Experts continue to argue over and work on the causes of low conception rate. Many of these problems are larger than individual dairy farms. With regards to conception rates on their farm, the most important factors dairymen can address are ensuring that the cows that are inseminated are truly in heat and the timing of breeding within the heat period.

With heat detection being such a big problem on most farms there is a tendency to call cows in heat when only the most minor of secondary signs of heat are detected. If these cows are not in heat then the chance of these cows becoming pregnant is zero. In the quest to improve heat detection make sure that you are not over zealous and call too many cows in heat that are not truly in heat.

The second factor is timing of breeding after finding cows in heat. Excellent work by Dr. Ray Nebel showed that cows are most fertile when inseminated 4-16 hours after the first standing heat. The problem when finding a cow in heat on the farm is you never know if this is the first standing heat or not. While the AM-PM rule works, when combined with the typical management systems on many farms it has the potential to result in cows being inseminated too late after their first standing heat. Take for example, a cow that is observed to be in sanding heat at 4 a.m. when cows are being gathered to be milked—this may be the first standing event for that cow or the cow may have been in heat all night. If this cow is not inseminated until after the evening milking it will be 13-23 hours after her first standing heat event. If the cow is inseminated after the morning milking then it would be 3-12 hours after the first standing event. Carefully consider how your management interacts with the timing of breeding after the cow is first detected in heat.

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Strategies for Improving Reproductive Performance: Culling—(Part four of four)

When evaluating reproductive records it is important to look at culling, as well. Excessive culling of cows for reproductive reasons can lead to good-looking reproductive records while actual reproductive performance is in need of improvement.

By the same token trying to expand the dairy herd may lead to keeping cows in the breeding herd for as long as possible. These cows may have an apparent negative impact on reproductive records when compared to another farm.

It is important to take these other factors into account when evaluating your reproductive records. Work closely with your veterinarian and all members of your management team to measure, monitor, and manage the reproductive performance on your dairy farm.

—John Currin,
Extension Dairy Veterinarian
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Upcoming Activities

Mar 24 — Dairy Management Institute—9:30-2:00—Rocky Mount—Contact Beverly Cox (540) 483-5161.

Mar 18 —DHIA Board/Annual Meeting— 10 a.m., Litton-Reaves Hall, Blacksburg, VA .

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.

Southern Virginia Dairy Revitalization Project.

Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia's State Dairymen's Association has partnered with the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification Commission to offer a cost share program to assist qualifying dairy producers in the counties of Wythe, Smyth, Washington and Franklin, make improvements in the areas of cow comfort and cow handling. This program will begin taking applications this March and dairy producers in this area will be receiving more information regarding this program. Contact Beverly Cox in Franklin County (540) 483-5836 or Chase Scott for the counties of Wythe, Smyth, and Washington (276)-780-2695.

To switch your mailed, paper subscription of the "Dairy Pipeline" to an electronic version, please send an email to vtdairy@vt.edu with "Pipeline Change" in the subject line. Remember to include the address to which it has been mailed in the past so we can remove you from our hard-copy mailing list.

Understanding MILC

Under the old MILC program, payments were calculated and directly deposited into producer accounts. The addition of the feed cost calculator will significantly lengthen the time needed to process producer payments as national feed price data must be assembled before payments can be calculated. The Advanced Class 1 Price for Boston is announced no later than the 23rd of the previous month. On January 23rd, we knew that the Class 1 price for Boston would be $13.97, $2.97 less than the target price of $16.94. These figures show that MILC enrollees will receive at least a $1.34/cwt supplement ($2.97 x 45%) from the federal government. However, the actual MILC payment rate cannot be calculated until FSA receives the National Ag Statistic Service data to calculate the National Average Dairy Feed Ration Cost. Acting State Executive Director for FSA in Virginia, Michael Wooden indicated that it would be late March before February feed data is available and April before actual payments could be made. He also indicated that in the future, FSA would issue payments no later than 60 days after production evidence is received for a given month or when the entire month's National Average Dairy Feed Ration cost is posted for that month, whichever is later.

Dairy farmers can roughly predict the MILC payment rate for any month as the advance class I price is released. Advance class pricing release dates can be viewed at the following website: http://www.fmmone.com/Northeast_Order/Dates/PriceReleaseDate2009.pdf.

The actual announced Class 1 Boston price can be viewed at the following website: http://www.fmmone.com/Northeast_Order_Prices/NE_Prices_main_new.htm#Advance

Historical milk prices show that the difference between the Class 1 price in Boston and Federal Order 5 (Appalachian) Uniform Blend Price is about - $1.20. Thus, with a February 2009 Class 1 Boston price of $13.97, and no significant over order premiums, producers could expect a blend price of around $12.77/cwt. Add to this the anticipated MILC supplement of $1.34 and it is realistic to expect that producers would receive at least $14.11/cwt to run their operations. Note that this assumes 3.5 % fat test, no premiums for quality or quantity and does not factor in any additional value for VA Milk Commission Base.

"Dairy farmers can roughly predict the MILC payment rate for any month as the advance class I price is released."

Please contact your local Dairy Agent or FSA Office for further assistance in learning about how the MILC program will affect your income in 2009.

—John Welsh
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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.

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