

## DAIRY PIPELINE

Department of Dairy Science

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[www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu](http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu)

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### Dairy Management Specialist position—

Department of Dairy Science,  
Virginia Tech

#### General Description

- Nine month; Tenure track; [70% Extension/30% Research]
- Earned Ph.D. in Dairy or Animal Sciences
- Assistant Professor
- Competitive Salary; Start Up Funds Available

Application review to begin  
November 15, 2012.

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### IMPROVING FARM PROFITABILITY — FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

What do a self-proclaimed “Grass Whisperer” (Troy Bishopp), an academic economist (Jason Karszes), and a one-milking-per-day dairyman (Cliff Hawbaker) all have in common? Each spoke at the 9<sup>th</sup> Mid-Atlantic Dairy Grazing Conference in Chestertown, MD in July, and each gave rather unique takes on ways to improve farm profitability.

It’s perhaps not surprising that a “grass whisperer” would recommend that you get down on your hands and knees to evaluate pastures. While it may be hard to follow, it’s still good advice. Looking at fields from the barn, the tractor, or the pickup cab may be more comfortable, it’s sort of like watching television. Getting into the picture through close observation allows you to see how things are really working. Does the pasture have lots of open, bare spaces? What forages are present? Do manure pats quickly disappear because of healthy worm or dung beetle populations? The grass on the other side of the fence may look greener, but you can’t really know without stepping out into it.

Jason Karszes (PRO-DAIRY, Cornell) presented comparisons of grass-based and conventional dairy operations from across the eastern US. While grass-based systems may not be for everybody, Karszes’ research shows that the financials of grass-based dairies generally are as well or better than for confinement herds. Interestingly, this occurs across quite a wide production range. The top 20% of grazing herds (based on return on assets) had RHA from 9,500 to 22,000 lb/cow in 2010. These numbers portray the different ways these farms can be effectively managed to

achieve profitability. Some producers seek high outputs with high inputs, but others live with low outputs on low inputs. And, “worst case scenarios” – high inputs with low outputs do occur.

Cliff Hawbaker once a 3 times milking/day confinement operator in Chambersburg, PA, converted to once a day (OAD) milking after he went to grass-based dairying. Hawbaker readily admitted that, just as with grass-based dairying, OAD may not be for everyone, but it is favorable for him in meeting his mission to optimize profitability and family goals. Using the concept of “right sizing”, Hawbaker has evaluated his operations (he now has two dairies) in order to optimize labor and input efficiencies. Other unique management practices include no grain feeding and no fermented feeds (only hay). The reduced input costs more than offset the production losses from these practices; the lower stress on animals has translated to 70-75% conception at first service and lower cull rates. Of course, the humans feel less stressed as well.

The points made by these speakers have relevance for nearly ALL dairy operations. In some form, all three speakers addressed the need to look at the details of the farm operation to see what was working or not and to adjust management accordingly. Following the pasture theme, I’ll make a final pitch for better pasture management. Even if your operation only uses pasture for heifers and dry cows, there are substantial opportunities to make cheap feed (i.e., money) by improving forage yield and quality through attention to soil fertility and grazing management.

—John Fike, Associate Professor  
Crop & Soil Environmental Sciences,  
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## Upcoming Activities

**Jan. 22-24**

Area Dairy Conferences  
Details TBA.

**Feb. 20-22, 2013**

[VSFA Nutritional Management & Cow College](#),  
Roanoke, VA

**Feb. 2013**

No-Till Conference  
Details TBA  
Contact [Matt Yancey](#)

### Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

■ Any producer or producer organization in the Southern region is eligible to apply for a Producer Grant. Details at [www.southernare.org/](http://www.southernare.org/). Application deadline Nov. 15.

*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.*

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



R.E. James,  
Dairy Extension Coordinator &  
Extension Dairy Scientist,  
Dairy Nutrition

## ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A 4-H DAIRY QUIZ BOWL

Increasing knowledge about the general dairy industry is one goal of the dairy youth program in the US. A major activity supporting this goal is dairy quiz bowl. Dairy quiz bowl has traditionally been a winter activity because youth can study the materials when it is too cold to spend extensive time outdoors fitting and showing dairy cattle or participating in dairy judging practices. While this activity is targeted at youth, dairy quiz bowl can benefit families and the family farm alike.

Quiz bowl questions cover many topics from farm to table including nutrition, udder health, milk quality, calf management, herd health, genetics, milk marketing, and dairy processing. Four-H dairy quiz bowl contests consist of an individual written test, team collaboration questions, and toss-up questions. Youth can participate in contests at district, state, and national levels to demonstrate their knowledge. The national 4-H dairy quiz bowl contest is held each year at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky. Several dairy breed organizations offer similar contests.

A few sample questions are given below. The answers appear at the end of the article.

1. How many Federal Milk Marketing Orders currently exist?
2. In what state is the headquarters of the National Milk Producers Federation located?
3. What term is used to indicate the accuracy of genetic evaluations?
4. What is the most effective management tool to control flies on a dairy farm?
5. During the dry period, the teat's streak canal is blocked by the formation of what?

Studying for dairy quiz bowl contests can be a great way to spend time as a family.

"It has been common for parents who help their children study to anecdotally report that they applied dairy quiz bowl information/knowledge in their dairy herd management with positive results."

Siblings and parents can be helpful by asking questions based on study materials. By reviewing information, parents may be reminded of information that may make a difference in herd management. It has been quite common for parents who help their children study to anecdotally report that they applied dairy quiz bowl information/knowledge in their dairy herd management with positive results. Information learned by youth can complement their other dairy experiences including dairy judging and ownership or leasing projects.

Youth certainly increase their basic knowledge of the dairy industry through dairy quiz bowl participation, but there are other benefits as well. They learn to practice good study habits, improve their communication skills,

practice teamwork, and develop self-confidence.

The Virginia 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl Materials can be a great resource for those who plan to compete or for those who just want to learn basic information about the dairy industry. They are available on-line at <http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu/youth/quizbowl/youth-quiz-bowl.html>.

Interested in getting your children involved in a 4-H dairy club? Contact your local extension office to learn about opportunities in your area.

—Dave Winston  
Extension Dairy Scientist &  
Dairy Youth Program Coordinator,  
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Answers: (1) 10; (2) Virginia; (3) Reliability; (4) Sanitation; (5) Keratin plug

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