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DAIRY PIPELINE

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How Soon After Calving Are Your Cows Being Bred?

Shortening the calving interval implies a greater proportion of the cows within a herd with fewer days in milk and, therefore, with greater milk yields. The calving interval is directly related to days open, a metric variable of great importance within the dairy farm. Breeding cows soon after calving increases the chances of reducing days open, especially when conception rates are less than desired. Therefore, one reproductive management approach to reducing days open is to revise the days to first service after calving.

First breeding after calving should be neither too late nor too early. Figures 1 and 2 show the days to first service plotted against days in milk for two different herds in Virginia. Herd A (Figure 1) would likely be described as having a sound reproductive program while herd B (Figure 2) has many areas in need of improvement. For example, herd A shows that most cows are bred after passing a voluntary waiting period (VWP) of 50 to 60 days. Contrary to this, the pattern of days to first service in herd B does not seem to respect VWP, as some breedings have been performed as soon as 10 days after calving. Also, herd A bred most of their cows for the first time within 100 days after calving, whereas herd B bred many of their cows for the first time beyond 120 days after calving. Finally, the pattern of breedings in herd A implies a programmed and controlled breeding plan, apparently absent in herd B.

In conclusion, monitoring days to first breeding is a simple tool to determine the suitability of the breeding program to shorten days open and calving interval indexes. If days to first service are too high, improvements in heat detection programs or implementation of synchronization and timed artificial insemination programs may deserve consideration.

—Gonzalo Ferreira
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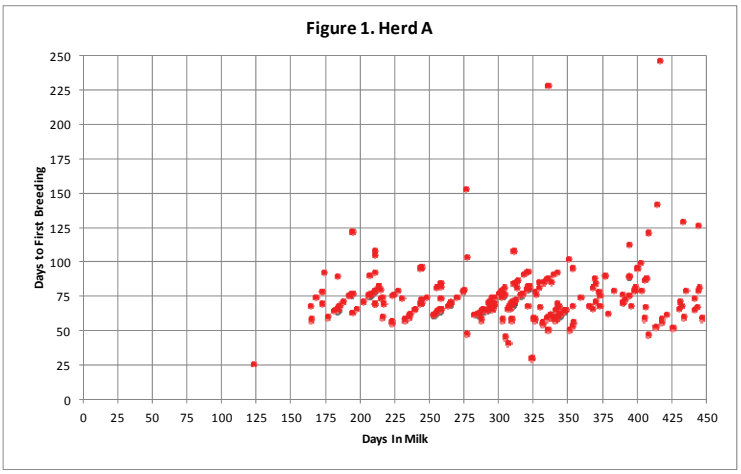

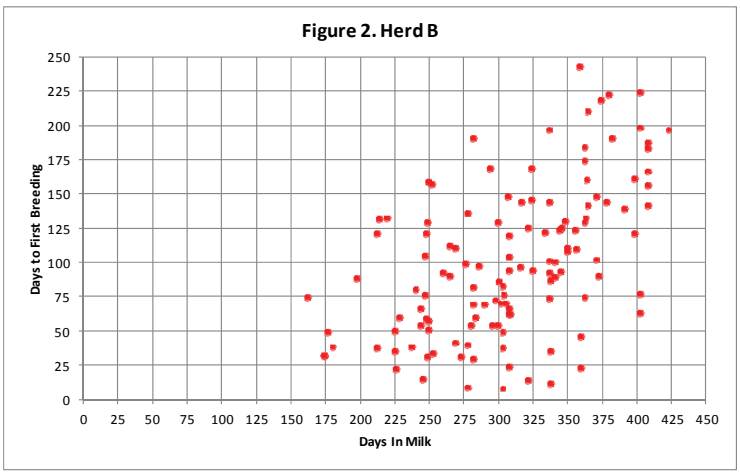

Upcoming Activities

Oct. 1-5—World Dairy Expo, Madison, WI

Oct. 17—Group Feeding calves for optimal performace with robotic systems, 6 pm, $5 registration fee, Rm. 100, VMRCVM, Blacksburg, VA

Oct. 18-19—Dairy Science Open House and Showcase Sale at Virginia Tech, Open House Registration

Oct 30—Forage Quality Meeting/Workshop 5:30 PM, Franklin Center, Rocky Mount, VA Contact cmartel@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

"Many options exist to look at information in different ways."

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

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

Making Dairy Information Systems Work

Recordkeeping is an exciting challenge to some and a necessary evil to others. Regardless of one's perspective, finding the right dairy information system is critically important to the profitability of a dairy operation. Having accurate, current information to make operational and financial decisions is key. Dairy information systems have changed much in recent years, largely due to advances in computer technology. While handwritten notes are simple and cheap, they don't allow for the summarization and data sorting needed to effectively monitor herd status and trends, particularly as herd size increases.

Today most producers use a combination of recordkeeping methods that includes paper records or notebooks, basic computer software (spreadsheets, databases), traditional DHI records, DHI herd management software (PCDART, Dairy Comp 305, DHI-Plus), or other herd management/financial management software.

Information needs vary from herd to herd due to differences in herd size, milking facilities, feeding programs, labor, etc. Several things should be considered when putting together the right information system. First, the system should have a positive impact on profitability; it should be within the operation's means when considering the cost, and it should give the producer tools to make better decisions that affect the bottom line. The system should also be flexible, easy to use, and must provide the necessary information to manage the operation.

The amount of information being collected on today's dairy farms can be overwhelming. There are so many parameters available through DHI records and herd management software that they can cause frustration and confusion. One way to address this situation is to simplify things by identifying information that one needs to track on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. For example, milk produced per cow and dry matter intake fall into the daily category.

Becoming familiar with new features of DHI's traditional records as well as PCDART, Dairy Comp 305 and other herd management software programs is important to stay current. Many options exist to look at information in different ways. New reports, graphics, and tools are available to assist with day-to-day management as well as troubleshooting management problems. In addition to the fairly recent Persistency Analysis, Survival Analysis and Transition Cow Management reports, Dairy Records Management Systems (DRMS) has also added the Tracker series (Activity Tracker, Heifer Tracker, Conception Tracker, and Maternity Tracker) to PCDART in order to help producers answer questions about herd management.

Perhaps the best advice for the producer is to find the system that works best for their management system, keep abreast of updates and new tools, and make best use of the information available to make

—Dave Winston, Extension Dairy Scientist & Dairy Youth Program Coordinator, (540) 231-5693 | dwinston@vt.edu

Dairy Producer Input Sought Regarding Genomics

Genomic testing of dairy cattle is a new technology that may be used for herd improvement.

Our multi-state dairy research and extension group (Washington State University, University of Idaho, and University of Florida) is investigating new fertility traits for which genomic technology might be used. We are interested in what dairy producers have heard or thought about genomic testing.

We invite you to share your thoughts by completing a short survey at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6G8L8WS The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. All responses will be anonymous. Thanks for helping us understand dairy producer opinions and educational needs related to genomics.

—Joe Dalton, University of Idaho
—Dale Moore, Washington State University

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