

The Next Decade in Dairy Business Management

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Four conferences were presented at the last American Dairy Science Association meeting in Minneapolis, MN (July 2006) to discuss the dairy business in the near future: labor management, feeding dairy cows, reproduction and dairy facilities.

The labor management works point out that the first step in developing a labor management strategy in the future is envisioning who the labor force will be. Agriculture will increasingly depend on foreign labor (mainly Hispanics) for the next decade to fill a wide array of positions. The main questions to discuss are: What type of positions will the business need as it grows? Will technology be adopted as a tradeoff against labor? What are the opportunities and implications for attracting or developing a workforce? The final step in a labor



management strategy is the selection and implementation of organizational and human resources management practices, such as a standard operating procedures, an employee handbook, job descriptions, performance feedback systems, and training and developing of the talent resource within the business.

Some of the discussed challenges for feeding high producing dairy cows in the next decade are: Feed efficiency, not only to improve the conversion of feeds to animal products, also, to decrease nutrient excretions and odor emissions. Nutrient sources that may have multiple impacts, like some essential fatty acids, which may enhance rumen fermentation, increased nutrient absorption, improve animal fertility and milk quality for human health. Others factors mentioned were: use of computer models to achieved desired milk yield and components, improved forage quality and yield to produce optimum nutrient yield, responses evaluation of new feed additives, economical benchmarks according to the production system, etc. The concern on limiting resources to conducting basic and applied nutrition research, and the mayor role of the feed industry on these aspects was also considered.

Reproduction efficiency in dairy cows currently is suboptimal due to four factors: 1. poor detection and expression of estrus, 2. high incidence of anovular cows, 3. poor conception rates, and 4. a high incidence

of pregnancy loss. Over the past decade, hormonal protocols to synchronize and resynchronize cows has helped to overcome factor 1 and to some extent factor 2. Regarding factor 3, clearly fertility has decrease over the past 50 years. Factor 3 and factor 4 are closely related; fertility is a function of both conception rates and pregnancy loss. For that reason, one challenge is to develop strategies that reduce embryonic loss. Other factor is to mitigate the negative effects of twinning in dairy herds, especially if twinning rates continue to increase.

Respect to facilities, and due to the trends to decrease the number of dairies with a greater number of animals, the emphasis has been placed on cow comfort and its impact on milk production, reproduction and animal health. Some of the major factors that need to be considered concerning cow comfort are: feedline space, access to water, grouping strategies, group size, time spend milking, travel distances to the parlor, cow handling system, ability to manage heat stress, and housing design. Local climate, biosecurity concerns and food safety, and the environmental regulations will have a major impact on the future dairy buildings.

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