

Dollar Drain

Dollar Saving Tips for Texas Dairies

February 2002

KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING

With tax time approaching, we all start gathering receipts and other items to prepare our reports. My accountant sends a comparison report to which I add my current year's income and expenses. The idea is to assess where I am this year compared to last year. Do you do the same type of audit on your herd? If you do, it is an excellent way to determine what has varied. Many times monthly changes slip by and we do not realize that a shift has occurred.

One program that provides a systematic entry of data is the dairy herd improvement (DHI) program. DHI provides certified technicians to record milk weights and milk samples. Data is entered at the farm into an on-farm database. What you do with your information after it has been recorded is what is important. You can receive reports on your cows that help you determine trends in your herd. Management changes can then be made to improve a target area.

DHI members recently received their yearly herd average listing. It also includes the state average for the current year. This data shows that production for Holsteins in 2001 was 19,442 pounds of milk, a drop of close to 1,100 pounds of milk from 2000. The production decline was associated with an increase in calving interval. Was the reduction in production and reproductive performance due to the weather conditions in the winter of 2000? Knowing that all herds dropped does not solve the problem, but at least you know other herds were also impacted.

Another report, available every 6 months, compares your herd to other Texas herds in your size category. A new program called DairyMetrics allows you to compare your herd against any other herds that are in the 1.5 million-cow database maintained by the DRMS in Raleigh.

In addition to the standard reports, if you have a microcomputer-based program such as PCDART, you can create graphs that provide information across time. For example, what did peak production do for the past 4 years? Did you see a dip in peak milk during the winter of 2000? Only knowing where you are and having an appreciation for how you got there will translate into a roadmap to stop the "Dollar Drain".

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