

DAIRY CONNECTION

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EDITORIAL

With each passing quarter, our hopes increase about better times that must lie ahead. As we are approaching the fourth quarter of 2009, our hope is beginning to wane. Better economic times are ahead but they won't come soon enough for most dairy farmers. In the span of about three years, milk prices have jumped from \$13 dollars to \$20 dollars and then dropped to the lowest in 30 years. Dairy producers also face the always-rising costs of product.

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How are you adjusting in these ever-changing times? The key to our future is how we accept change. In a recent article, I was introduced to "transformative changes" as explained by Alan Roxburgh. The article describes the transformation change process in five stages.

1. Awareness: Recognize that change has taken place and might cause us to try to gain some knowledge about the change that has taken place. Knowing not only what has changed but also about why the change might have happened could be very useful.
2. Understanding: This stage is where we have an opportunity to reflect on the knowledge we have gained. It is the time we have to make this knowledge ours. This is the stage at which we can accurately describe the situation to someone else.
3. Evaluation: This is the stage where we ask ourselves, "What does all this mean?" It is time for discernment and for sorting things out. It is a time for coming up with options. It is a time for making decisions.
4. Experimentation: This is the action phase when we decided what we are going to do now. This may involve trying to do some different things. It also may involve doing some things we already are doing but doing them a little bit differently. The "up" side of experimentation is that some experiments will succeed. The "down" side of experimentation is that some things will fail. The key to action-oriented experimentation is to observe and evaluate what seems to work better and what doesn't seem to work.
5. Adoption: This is the stage where we implement new habits that work. Adaptive change really is about learning new habits.

What does "transformative change" have to do with the current state of the dairy industry or the individual situations of dairy farmers? It has to do with how we respond to the change that already has taken place. It also has to do with us pursuing a course of action that we hope will put us in a better place than where we are now. Many dairy farmers are considering strategies to reduce costs that don't affect returns negatively or are seeking better returns for the money they are spending. Family spending habits in the current economy seem to be changing as consumers are eating fewer meals away from home and are buying more store brand items and spending less on discretionary items.

Good reading,


NDSU
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■ HEIFERS AND CALVES

Colostrum Management

If your calves are not achieving a blood serum total protein of more than 5.2 grams per deciliter for maternal-source colostrum and are having problems, check for the Big Four: quality, quantity, timing and contamination.

- Quality – use a colostrometer and make sure the colostrum is free of blood, debris and mastitis
- Quantity – 10 percent of body weight
- Timing – within the first four hours of life
- Contamination – culture colostrums for bacteria (less than 100,000 colony forming units per milliliter)

Colostrum Protocol

Collection

- Fresh cows move to milking area within two hours of calving.
- Milk fresh cows before sick or treated cows.
- Cow preparation is identical to routine parlor practices.
- Milking equipment is serviced and sanitized between cows and between milking.
- Save a frozen sample for future reference (bacterial contamination).
- Save colostrum for calves only if the cow or heifer meets these criteria:
 - Johnes ELISA test negative
 - Healthy
 - No mastitis
 - Has not leaked milk
 - No bloody milk
 - Has been dry at least 45 days and is in the transition group for a minimum of 14 days

Labeling and Storage

- Fresh colostrum is put into 4-quart calf bottles or zipper-type containers.
- Each container is marked with cow ID and date of collection.
- Colostrum not fed within two hours is placed into clean refrigeration with a preservative (potassium sorbate)
- Colostrum more than seven days old is discarded.

Administration

- Calves are moved out of the calving area immediately after birth.
- One single meal of first-milk colostrum (from a single cow) is given to newborn calves.
- One gallon of high-quality colostrums needs to be fed within one hour after birth (esophageal feeder).
- An additional 2 quarts should be fed six hours later if applicable.

Source: Dairy Calf and Heifer Association, Heard in the Hutch

Diagnose Freemartins Early

In these tough times, cutting expenses in the right places is prudent. One of those “right places,” although small, is to identify as early as possible which heifers born twin to a bull are sterile and not spend money raising these freemartin heifers.

About 90 percent to 95 percent of heifers born twin to a bull are sterile. Even among single births, a few heifers will be sterile as a consequence of the death of the male twin early in the pregnancy, which allows testosterone from the male fetus to alter development of the female reproductive tract. Most heifers born twin to a bull have a vulva and vestibule, but the vagina, cervix, uterus and ovaries are underdeveloped.

Measuring the length of the vagina in the young calf is one way to get an idea if a heifer born twin to a bull is a freemartin. In normal Holstein calves less than 1 month of age, the vagina is about 5 inches (13 centimeters) long, but in freemartin Holstein calves, it is 2 to 3.25 inches (5 to 8 centimeters) long. In one study, all Holstein heifers less than 1 month of age with a vaginal length of 2¾ inches (7 centimeters) or less were freemartins. The measurement can be made with the lubricated round end of a vacutainer or a commercially available curved plastic probe. Precaution should be taken to make sure one is measuring the distance to the front end of the vagina and not the distance to the hymen in a normal heifer.

A probe can be inserted beyond 7 centimeters in about 10 percent of the Holstein heifers born twin to a bull up to 1 month of age. About half of the heifers in this category are normal. These heifers can be identified positively by cytogenetic testing or raised until a diagnosis can be done by ultrasound or palpation.

Source: Kentucky Dairy Notes, August 2009, George Heersche Jr.

■ MILK QUALITY

Milk Quality Monitored by USDA in Conjunction with NMC

Milk quality in the United States is monitored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH) in conjunction with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the NMC Milk Quality Monitoring Committee. The AMS provides the CEAH with bulk tank somatic cell count (BTSCC) data from four of the nation’s 10 Federal Milk Marketing Orders (FMOs). The CEAH analyzes the data and reports the results annually, and the NMC (formerly the National Mastitis Council) provides guidance and oversight for the analysis and reporting.

In 2007, four FMOs – Central, Mideast, Southwest and Upper Midwest – were monitored. These FMOs were monitored for milk from 36,528 producers in 32 states and accounted for nearly half of the country’s milk supply.

The milk-weighted geometric BTSCC mean in 2007 was 260,000 cells per milliliter. This is compared with 249,000 in 2006 and 258,000 in 2005. The milk-weighted BTSCC takes into account

the amount of milk shipped by a producer, resulting in an overall BTSCC mean of monitored milk.

The producer shipment BTSCC – which is a geometric, nonmilk-weighted mean of all shipments (i.e., all shipments have equal weight) – was 298,000 in 2007, compared with 293,000 in both 2005 and 2006.

More than 99 percent of the milk shipped in these FMOs during 2007 met the current Pasteurized Milk Ordinance somatic cell count (SCC) limit of 750,000. In addition, 83.2 percent of the monitored milk had BTSCCs less than 400,000, which is the current European Union SCC regulatory limit.

Of the 36,528 producers monitored in the four FMOs during 2007, 88.6 percent shipped milk with BTSCCs below 750,000 during all the months monitored while 43.8 percent of the producers shipped milk with BTSCCs below 400,000.

Monthly monitoring continues to show that BTSCCs peak during July through September. In 2007, monthly milk-weighted BTSCCs were highest during August (299,000) and lowest in December (232,000). Data from 2007 shows an increase of 11,000 cells per milliliter in the milk-weighted geometric mean BTSCC compared with 2006.

Source: *Udder Topics*, Volume 31, No. 5 – October/November 2008

What to Expect from Postmilking Teat Disinfection

The rate of new intramammary infection can be 50 percent lower when disinfecting teats with an effective product immediately after every milking compared with no disinfection. Teat disinfection does not affect existing mammary gland infections but may reduce colonization of the teat ducts by coagulase-negative staphylococci. Existing infections are best eliminated by dry cow treatment and culling chronically infected cows. Preventing new infections by using teat disinfection reduced the prevalence of mastitis in a dairy herd in the long term. Improvements, such as fewer cases of clinical mastitis and/or lower herd somatic cell count, generally can be observed within a few months.

Source: NMC Factsheet “Postmilking Teat Disinfection” (2007)

HERD MANAGEMENT

Bacterial Growth in Bedding Compound

Digested manure solids supported the greatest amount of growth of the coliform mastitis pathogen *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, according to a University of Minnesota study published in the January *Journal of Dairy Science*. Recycled sand and wood shavings were next in line, with clean sand promoting the least amount of *Klebsiella* growth.

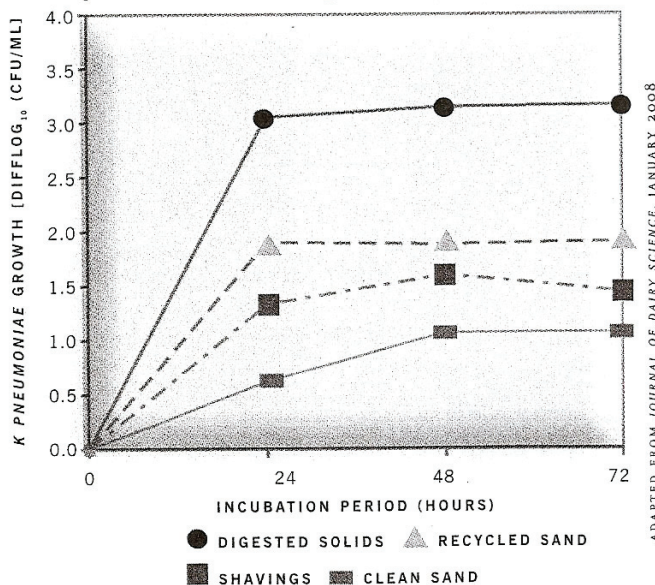
The researchers also studied the ability of these bedding materials to support the growth of another environmental mastitis species called *Enterococcus faecium*. Recycled sand supported a mild increase of *E. faecium* bacterial numbers. Digested manure solids did not experience a change in bacterial counts during the 72-hour incubation period. Counts in clean

sand and shaving declined dramatically during the incubation period, with the magnitude of the decline being greatest for shavings, say the researchers.

Bedding samples used in the study came from the bedding storage areas of commercial dairy farms in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Source: *Dairy Herd Management*, February 2008

Comparison of growth of *Klebsiella pneumoniae* among bedding types



How Many is Too Many

Philip Crosby, who was one of the leaders in the modern quality movement, stated that the quality goal should be “zero defects.” Many in the field dismissed this as unrealistic because they felt it is impossible to achieve. One is inclined to agree with the masses on this point until the goal is examined more closely.

What is a realistic goal for defects, errors or whatever you use to measure quality? Each person likely would have a different idea as to what is realistic and achievable, depending upon his or her previous experience and level of comfort in dealing with problems.

Let’s start with the premise that one error in a million is acceptable. I think everyone would agree that achieving this goal would result in pretty good quality. So, if one in a million is acceptable, what about two in a million? That’s only one more error, what harm could that be? Now if two in a million is acceptable, what about three in a million or four in a million? After all, it’s only a couple more errors. However, it is no longer one in a million but one in 250,000. That is quite a difference.

I think you can see where this is going. When do you say “enough is enough” and draw the proverbial line in the sand? As you can see, that becomes a difficult task because each time you only accepted one or two more errors as being acceptable. The further you get from the original goal, the more difficult drawing the line becomes.

You might be thinking, “What does this have to do with managing dairy cows?” The answer is “plenty.” The same principle can be applied to almost everything we do in the managing of cows. Did we miss a cow or heifer when we were synchronizing the last group? How many cases of mastitis, ketosis, milk fever, etc. did you have in the past month or year? Anywhere you find a potential problem, we can apply this principle and strive to correct the situation.

Does this mean we should panic whenever a problem occurs? No. We are working with living animals and environmental conditions over which we have only so much control. However, this does not relieve us of the responsibility to look at each error and see what might have been done differently to eliminate the error in the future.

I hope you now look at each error in a different way. We obviously will not be able to eliminate all problems. But if we accept one, accepting the next one and then the next one is all too easy until the situation is overwhelming.

Source: W.D. Gilson, Georgia Dairy Fax

■ NUTRITION

Managing Feed Costs

Historically, feed costs have represented 40 percent to 60 percent of the total cost of producing milk. However, in the past year, this value has been higher on many farms. Consequently, when times are tough, cutting feed costs is the first place many producers look. The key issue to keep in mind is, “Are there ways to reduce feed costs without losing milk?” Cutting feed costs by eliminating or reducing the amount of supplemental protein or the mineral-vitamin premix is very easy, but often this will result in dramatic reductions in milk produced. Your goal should be to maintain milk production while managing other costs.

Let’s look at five key feed cost management issues. First, how much “extra” feed are you putting in front of your cows and then cleaning out of the bunk the next day? Historically, most producers have fed for an average of 5 percent refusal, the goal being to have feed available in the event that a cow wants to eat another mouthful. Reducing the targeted amount of refusals from 5 percent to 2 percent means about \$400 per month for every 100 cows in your herd. Refusals from the milking cows often are fed to other livestock on the farm, but this becomes more expensive feed for them than what they really need.

Second, look at every ingredient in your ration. Does it contain some “questionable” ingredients? Most dairy rations will need some supplemental protein, as well as a mineral-vitamin premix, but what about “other” ingredients? Some undoubtedly will increase milk production and “pay their way,” but are all of them? If you are not sure, take them out of the ration.

Third, are you overfeeding some nutrients? Too many producers rely on average or “book values” for the nutrient value of their forages (alfalfa and corn silage). However, the actual protein, fiber and energy in these feedstuffs can vary widely. This can

result in feeding more supplemental protein than is needed, costing you money, or not feeding enough supplemental protein, costing you milk. Either way, you lose. The same thing is true on the energy side, causing you to feed more or less corn grain than you should, again costing you one way or the other.

Fourth, historically, nutritionists have formulated rations for a higher level of nutrients than the animal requires because it was “cheap insurance” and to account for the variability in the nutrient content of the feedstuffs. Sharpen your pencils and feed to meet but not exceed the nutrient requirements of your cows.

Finally, don’t forget to monitor the dry matter or moisture content of your wet feedstuffs! A small, unnoticed change in the moisture content of your corn silage, for example, can mean you are feeding a couple more pounds of water and similar smaller amount of valuable nutrients, resulting in a drop in milk production. The bottom line is that we need to do everything we can to put as much milk in the bulk tank as possible but in a cost-efficient manner. Be careful about cutting your feed costs by cutting out the key nutrients that the cow needs to maintain her current level of milk production.

Source: ISU Extension, L. Kilmer

How Do I Price Forages?

In these times of low milk prices and high input cost, dairies may be all the more eager to feed as much forage as possible. To do so may mean looking to neighbors as a source for forages. And with that comes the proverbial question: How do I determine the price of forages?

You have many approaches to compute how much to pay or charge when buying or selling forages. The methods range from very simple to relatively complex in terms of the information needed to determine a price for forage.

Here are the common approaches:

1. **Use current prices in the area.** This quick method doesn’t account for such factors as differences in nutrient or day-matter (DM) content of silages. A variation of this approach is to use prices from auctions where forages are sold. This works better for hay than silage. At a recent Pennsylvania auction, the price for a ton of mixed hay ranged from \$65 to \$185. What was different about these hays to cause such a large price swing?
2. **Use published prices as a reference point.** Web access provides a number of sources. The June Penn State list had a price of \$37.40 per ton for average corn silage at 33 percent DM. The price for average legume hay was \$162 per ton. These price lists don’t account for factors such as variations in nutrient content and DM.
3. **Use information from crop enterprise budgets.** A number of computer programs or factsheets can be used to determine the actual costs of producing various crops:
 - For North Dakota
– www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/aginfo/farmmgmt/cropbudget.htm

- For other states
 - www.aede.osu.edu/programs/FarmManagement/budgets
 - <http://agguide.agronomy.psu.edu/cm/sec12/sec121.cfm>
 - www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/Pricingstandhay-FOF.pdf
 - <http://cdp.wisc.edu/crop%20enterprise.htm>

These sites take into account such factors as the costs for seed, fertilizer, machinery and labor, plus yields. Some programs allow for inclusion of storage costs and losses.

The crop enterprise budget tools require that you supply a lot of detailed information. But it's worth the effort since you can do such things as adjust forage price based on factors such as yield per acre.

In 2009, a sample budget showed a total cost of \$698 per acre to produce conventional-tillage corn silage. The break-even price of the corn silage ranged from \$29 per ton with a yield of 24 tons per acre to \$38.78 at an 18-ton-per-acre field.

Corn silage yield per acre is a major factor in determining corn silage price when using crop budgets. As you look ahead to future crop years, consider using some of the crop enterprise budget tools.

Source: Dairy Business, L. Chase and T. Overton, Cornell University

Using Computers

A number of these computer-based programs, ranging in ease of use and the quantity of input data required, are available. These programs value forages based on nutrient content rather than an enterprise cost-of-production estimate.

Here's a short list of computer spreadsheets to check out:

- **Pricer:** www.uwex.edu/ces/dairynutrition/spreadsheets.cfm
This is designed specifically for pricing forages. Pricer requires prices for corn, soybean meal and base forage. It also requires information on cow body weight, milk production and milk price.
- **Forages.xls:** www.das.psu.edu/xls/forages.xls
Inputs for this program are prices for corn grain, soybean meal and average-quality legume hay.
- **FeedVal:** www.uwex.edu/ces/dairynutrition/spreadsheets.cfm

This provides different FeedVal programs that vary in the inputs required. The original FeedVal program uses neutral detergent fiber (NDF) as one of the nutrient inputs. FeedVal 3 and 4 don't consider NDF and are less applicable for pricing forages. FeedVal requires prices of corn soybean meal, limestone and dicalcium phosphate.

- **SESAME:** www.sesamesoft.com
This program calculates the cost of forages using energy, protein and fiber fractions in the feed.

All of the computer programs allow you to modify basic forage analysis parameters, such as DM, crude protein (CP) and NDF,

so you can get an estimated price based on the quality of forages you either grow or want to buy.

Most of the programs are fast and relatively easy to use. The simpler programs (forages.xls, FeedVal) require less input information but still provide useful feed price estimates that can be used as a starting point for sale or purchase information.

The Sesame program, for which you must pay a fee, encompasses more nutrient considerations in estimating feed prices and should give a more precise estimate.

Predicted Forage Value, \$/ton

Program	20% CP	35% DM/ 44% NDF
Forages.xls	164	51
FeedVal	169	48
Pricer	172	58
Sesame	160	63

Source: DairyBusiness

■ FORAGES

Tips for Harvesting and Storing High-quality Corn Silage

Corn silage is the backbone of many year-round feeding programs for dairy cows and heifers. With today's dairy economic situation of tight to nonexistent profit margins, corn silage is an excellent source of energy that can reduce the costs of providing energy (starches) in the dairy cow's diet while also serving as a digestible fiber source. Paying attention to a few details while harvesting and storing corn silage can help ensure that a high-quality feed is preserved.

1. Spend time getting equipment ready before harvest: General maintenance needs to be done well in advance of the anticipated chopping date. Advanced planning is important for timely harvest at the proper moisture content.
2. When should I start harvesting? Harvesting at the correct moisture promotes favorable fermentation in the silage crop and decreases storage losses. Thus, the moisture content of the chipped plant should be the determining factor for when to harvest. For bunkers, silage should contain 30 percent to 35 percent dry matter (65 percent to 70 percent moisture). Upright silos and bags can be a little drier at 35 percent to 40 percent dry matter (60 percent to 65 percent moisture). Silage that is put up too wet results in butyric acid type fermentation, which decreases feed intake and can result in ketosis in early lactation cows. Silage that is too dry will have more and larger air pockets, which results in a poorer fermentation and less beneficial acids for cows to use to make milk and meat.

During "normal" growing conditions, corn is harvested approximately 40 to 45 days after tasseling. In the past, the appearance of brown leaves was used as a factor in determining the optimum harvest window. With today's

corn genetics, corn plants stay green longer and this target is not an appropriate benchmark. Moisture content is related to the stage of maturity of the corn grain. Corn is harvested for silage at a one-half to three-fourths milk line. However, weather and growing conditions can change the optimum stage of maturity for harvest. An experiment showed that the stage of maturity of the corn plant correctly predicted harvest moisture content only 68 percent to 85 percent of the time. The strong recommendation is to actually measure the moisture or dry-matter content of representative chopped corn plants.

3. Correct length of chop: Silage needs to be chopped fine enough for good packing to produce a good fermentation process quickly. At the same time, the chop length needs to be long enough to promote cud chewing. Thus, the recommended theoretic length of chop (TLC) is a compromise between these two factors. Alfalfa haylage or silage should be chopped at 3/16 inch, unprocessed corn silage at 3/8 to 1/2 inch and processed (kernel processor) corn silage at 3/4 inch.
4. Adjusting silage choppers with on-line kernel processors: The optimum moisture content of silage harvested with a chopper containing a kernel processor is 62 percent to 65 percent (35 percent to 38 percent dry matter) to capture additional starch accumulation in the corn kernels. Most nutritionists want to see most of the corn kernels pulverized to a similar size. To optimize starch digestion and provide adequate fiber, the recommendation is to cut to 3/4 inch theoretical length with an initial roller clearance of 0.12 inch. If kernel breakage is not adequate, the roller clearance should be decreased. To test whether adequate kernel damage is occurring, collect a silage sample from several loads in a 32-ounce cup. Pick out and count the number of whole and half kernels. If the number of whole or half kernels exceeds two or three, improve kernel damage by adjusting the roller clearance. Essentially, the goal is to have 55 percent to 64 percent of the kernels damaged.
5. Keep knives sharp and properly adjusted throughout the filling process: Sharp knives prevent the shredding of silage, resulting in a more uniform chop. This allows for maximum forage compaction, good fermentation and sufficient particle size to prevent health problems in the cow.
6. Fill silos rapidly: Silos should be filled quickly to help eliminate air from the feed. Silos should be filled within a week to prevent dark brown and black bands within the silo. Silage bags should be placed in an area that can be protected from damage by birds, rodents and other wildlife. Bunkers should be filled from the back to the front by adding forage on a wedge and not from the bottom to the top in layers.
7. Pack, pack and pack some more: Tightly-packed silage ferments more quickly and contains fewer yeasts and mold than loosely packed silage. Packing silage helps decrease the size of oxygen pockets, resulting in fermentation end products the cow can use better to make milk. For a bunker, the statement that when you think you are done packing, you should pack that much more is definitely true. For silage stored in a bag, monitoring the diameter of the bag to achieve the proper packing density is important.

8. Cover silos immediately after filling: Bunkers or piles of silage need to be covered with 6-mil plastic tarps and weighted with tires (tires should touch each other) immediately after filling. The sides of the bunkers also should be lined with plastic. Upright silos should be leveled and capped with a silo cap immediately after completion of filling. Uncovered silos lose a tremendous amount of feed and feed nutrients.
9. Let silage ferment three to four weeks before feeding (if possible): Unfermented feed is higher in fermentable sugars and can cause cows to go off feed. Gradually transitioning cows during seven to 10 days to newly fermented silage is recommended, if possible, or use dry hay to buffer cows through the transition.
10. Is silage done fermenting three weeks after harvest? Some data from forage testing labs indicates that fermentation and the maximum percentage of available starch may not be achieved until four months after ensiling. Does this mean we do not feed newly harvested corn silage in the fall? No, but these data may explain why your cows milk better on silage around the first of the year.

Source: Kentucky Dairy Notes, August 2009

■ BUSINESS

Know Your Mediation Rights During These Tough Times

The following information comes from the Code of Iowa, Chapter 654A, Farm Mediation-Farmer-Creditor Disputes:

- a. Agricultural property includes real estate and person property.
- b. Participate means attending a mediation meeting and discussing issues, stating position and exchanging information.
- c. The chapter applies to all creditors of natural persons, corporations, trust or limited partnerships operating a farm with a secured debt in excess of \$20,000.
- d. **Creditors must file a request for mediation from the Iowa Mediation Service before filing for any collection activity in the courts.** It is a jurisdictional requirement.
- e. Within 21 days of receiving a request for mediation, the Mediation Service must send a mediation notice to the borrower. Within 21 days of receiving that notice, the initial mediation meeting must be held.
- f. The mediator shall:
 1. Listen to the borrower and the creditors desiring to be heard.
 2. Attempt to mediate between the borrower and creditor.
 3. Advise the borrower and the creditors of the existence of available assistance programs.
 4. Encourage the parties to adjust, refinance or provide for payment of the debts.
 5. Advise, counsel and assist the borrower and creditors in attempting to arrive at an agreement for the future conduct of financial relations among them.

- g. The creditor may receive a release if the borrower waves mediation or if all the parties attend the mediation meeting(s) and fail to reach an agreement.
- h. The mediator may deny a release if the creditor fails to participate and must notify the creditor of the reasons for the denial.

Source: J. Baker, attorney, Beginning Farm Center

Communicating for Succession Success

Providing opportunities to succeeding generations is a priority for many family owned businesses. A critical reality of this generational transition is that a succession plan, in and of itself, will not make poor relationships whole. When poor relationships exist, the process of succession is what becomes the most important element of planning. Discussions about small details of how ownership and management will transition provide the opportunity to acknowledge and resolve issues. A well-structured and thorough succession plan can provide the foundation for good relationships to function at a level of greatness. One of the key parts of a well-structured and thorough succession plan is a functional communication structure for the family business.

The design of this functional communication structure should begin with a deliberate effort to open lines of communication among family members. On paper, interpersonal communication is a relatively simple exercise. However, it is a complexity of family business relationships that often is neglected. Through time, the absence of adequate communication can lead to the breakdown of relationships and limits the family's ability to accomplish succession planning goals. Communicating about individual expectations, business core values, business financial situation and appreciation for one another are some areas of discussion that will encourage a healthy dialogue. It is never too early to begin this conversation.

Successors develop perceptions about expectations and opportunities – as well as dysfunction – in the family business very early on. Recognizing the perspective of potential successors provides tremendous motivation to deliberately create a positive environment and boost the level of harmony in the family. Initial attempts at formal communication tend to be emotional and awkward. Often, difficult conversations take place for the first time. Involvement by a third party in initial discussions can be helpful in keeping the conversation objective and at a problem-solving level. An effective facilitator will ask disturbing questions that address pivotal family and business topics – questions that if asked by a family member could result in a less-than-productive conversation.

Remember that behavioral change does not happen overnight. Don't get discouraged if your initial attempts feel uncomfortable. Strive to build communication skills. The resulting higher level of family harmony will improve the pace of transition and, most importantly, the family satisfaction with the overall outcome of succession.

Source: M. Oesch, Lookout Ridge Consulting

Survey on Milking Systems

Recently, DairyBusiness magazine surveyed dairy producers on their milking parlors/systems and found some regional similarities.

Dairy producers cited cow traffic as the biggest factor limiting efficiency. Automatic takeoffs were overwhelmingly the technology most could not live without. Producers in the West were slightly more likely to utilize technology in their milking parlors, including linking parlors, to management software and monitoring cow identification, milk weights, cow activity and milk conductivity.

In the West, producers expressed the need for crowd gates; in the East, crowd gates and upgrades in existing, older equipment were mentioned most often. When asked what they wanted to read more about, Western producers emphasized technology and employee training that improves parlor efficiency. Eastern producers wanted more information on robotics.

Source: DairyBusiness, September 2009

■ FOR THE CALENDAR

Dairy Convention Slated

Forty-third Annual North Dakota Dairy Convention

"Sustaining Farm and Family"

Wednesday and Thursday, Nov. 11-12, 2009

Best Western Seven Seas Inn, 2611 Old Red Trail (Junction of I-94 and Exit 152), Mandan, N.D.

Trade Show

Silent Auction – Contribute to the North Dakota Friends of the Dairyman, which uses these funds to provide a dairy scholarship for the North Dakota Dairy Princess contest. It is the longest running dairy princess contest in the United States and just crowned its 63rd winner. Anyone is encouraged to donate an item.

Day One

- Going Green in a Black and White World
- Demystifying Technology
- People Communicating With People
- Dairy Panelists: Andrew Holle, Rita Mosset, Mark Doll and Karissa Brobst
- Convention Social
- Awards Banquet
- Entertainment – Corrinne Leiser (dairy farmer and humorist)
- Taking care of your people and your business

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Day Two

- Let's Just Blow Bubbles! – *Randi Schaffer*
- Our Milk Market – Milk processors discuss the issues with representatives Ken McMahon, Associated Milk Producers Inc.; Steve Watrin, Land O' Lakes; Randy McGinnis, Dairy Farmers of America; and Virgil Johnson, Dakota Country Cheese, providing presentations and a panel session to answer your questions. (Questions can be submitted in advance.)
- Annual Meeting and Luncheon – *Milk Producers of North Dakota*

Registration will be at the door. For lodging information, contact Best Western Seven Seas Inn at (701) 663-7401 or (800) 597-7327.

The Milk Producers Association of North Dakota dairy convention planning committee encourages you to find time to participate again this year. Both days should prove quite interesting.

Here are some tips for getting the most out of your time spent in this or any meeting:

1. Ask questions. People hold back from asking questions in large groups for a variety of reasons. Think of your question as a service to others in the audience. Chances are, if you're

wondering about something the speaker has said, other people in the group are wondering the same thing.

2. Let new ideas simmer. Either labeling a new concept as ridiculous or accepting it as gospel is human nature. Making a snap judgment in either direction is an obstacle to learning. If something strikes you either way, make a mental to assess it later at a time when you're not processing a lot of new information. Sometimes new ideas bounce off the wall. Sometimes, though, they stick.
3. Network. Break periods between conference sessions offer a great opportunity to talk with other producers who are facing similar problems and challenges. They also can provide an opportunity to discuss topics with leading thinkers and innovators from the industry. Exchange contact information with the people you meet so you can keep learning from each other once the conference is over.
4. Follow up. Taking an employee, a member of your farm management team or a neighbor to a conference with you is another way to maximize the experience. After the conference, get together with the other person who attended and discuss the presentations. Your discussions may result in new ideas and approaches or a better understanding of what was presented.