Dairy Day emphasizes reproductive efficiency for profit

The birth of a calf is necessary to initiate milk production. The first three months of milk production after calving is the highest daily production period. As time passes, daily milk output declines until the cow enters her dry period. It is economically imperative that dairy producers get cows and heifers pregnant in a timely manner to maintain a higher daily milk output per cow.

A dairy industry guideline is to have cows calve on a 12 to 13 month schedule and to have heifers calve for the first time around 22 to 24 month of age. Delayed pregnancy that causes deviations from this norm generally results in higher feed costs with less milk revenue. Using typical milk production levels and milk priced at $16/cwt. if a producer can reduce the average days in milk by 20 days, milk income will increase by around $25,000 per 100 cows per year.

This year’s Dairy Day program held at the Otesaga Resort in Cooperstown featured three dairy reproduction experts as speakers. The morning program addressed economics and using beef bulls to breed low merit cows. The afternoon sessions run concurrently allowed people to attend the topic of interest to them. Session A covered various estrus synchronization programs that can work. Session B covered natural heat detection along with the use of artificial insemination. Session C covered natural service, the use of bulls, and all the safety precautions needed when working around bulls.
Proper livestock techniques can lead to higher prices

For example: Bull $0.56/lb @ 1300lbs = $668 VS. Steer $1.06/lbs @ 1300lbs = $1,378. Difference of $710 per head.
By performing a workshop that was hands on, without the use of live animals we were able to practice many different types of scenarios. We were able to demonstrate why and how a scenario would have affected the animal if done that way versus the proper way. It was a fun learning experience for all in attendance. There was a great turnout for this series and Ashley plans to do another series this fall on this same topic in the other counties in the region.

Succession Planning Workshop series helps bring next generation to the farm

Winter brought the Succession Planning Workshop series to Madison County. This three part series was designed to delve deeper in the beginning phases of farm transfer to the next generation. During the lunch time meetings, farm families learned about effective communication, estate planning, tax and business structure considerations, and developing a vision for the farm future.

The beginning piece on farm communication was presented by Erica Leubner MSW from NY FarmNet, set the tone for the series. Interacting and working together to build better dialogue and mutual respect was the foundation for the remainder of the series. Anna Richards, PRO-Dairy’s Dairy Farm Business Specialist discussed tactics in preserving the integrity of the farm business while working among family in the transition state. Anna’s discussion was insightful and poignant for the generational farm working toward the delicate balance of wealth management. The final segment married the other two workshops together to get folks thinking about the future vision of the farm. Each segment was very informative and at the end, families had a deeper understanding of themselves and each other in order to move forward in the farm transition process.

Helping farms consider alternatives to milking cows

As dairy farmers continue to sell off their dairy herds, they are looking for alternatives to stay in farming. Many of them would like to keep working with animals on their farm so Livestock Specialist Ashley McFarland, Dairy Specialist Dave Balbian and Farm Business Management Specialist Nicole Tomnell spoke about beef and dairy heifers as possible alternatives. The meetings were held in two central locations, Morrisville and Fonda, within the region and were well attended by many current and past dairy farmers as well as a few producers who were interested in starting to raise beef cattle.

What most dairy producers do not realize is the amount of change that may need to take place to their facilities to accommodate beef cattle such as removing stalls, filling in gutters, adding headlocks or additional fencing. It is necessary to add handling equipment like chutes to protect owner and animals. Cash flow changes will take getting used to as income will be more seasonal.

Dairy heifer raising can stand the best chance for success if growers enter into a contract situation with a dairy farm that values getting their own genetics in return and will pay a premium for this service.

Using forage quality testing to improve the corn silage hybrid selection process on dairy farms

Dairy farms can have a tough time selecting corn hybrids based on quality because there is not a single value of performance that is used consistently across all seed companies.

Dairy Specialist Dave Balbian and Field Crop Specialist Kevin Ganoe have just completed a two year project with the NYFVI on using green forage samples collected at harvest to assess hybrid performance. The protocols used matched those for Corn Silage Hybrid Evaluation Program at Cornell. A measure of undigestibility, uNDF 240, of the corn silage is used to compare the performance of the hybrids. The lower the value the greater expected feed intake and milk production.

Lowering corn silage uNDF 240 one percentage point has the potential to increase milk production 7 pounds of milk per cow per day. For 100 cows that is an increase of $54,160 per year.

According to the 2017 US ag census data, over fifty seven thousand acres of corn are planted for silage in the eight counties serviced by the team. The 21 project farms were able to test their own corn silage to look for differences in performance and compare that data to other participating farms and the Corn Silage Hybrid Evaluation tests for the year. Brown mid rib hybrids proved to consistently have the lowest uNDF 240 so some growers looked to utilize them more even though silage yield is lower. Growers will need to continue to use the yearly Corn Silage Hybrid Evaluation Program data as corn silage hybrid quality does not always appear to be consistent from location to location or year to year.