Cornell Cooperative Extension | Northwest NY Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Program

AG FOCUS

Cows give off pheromones that calm calves. There is promise in using synthetic pheromones for animal wellbeing. Credit: Nancy Glazier

Ask Extension: What is FerAppease®? Does it Work?

Nancy Glazier

These questions were recently asked in a beef webinar. FerAppease®, the product that was mentioned, is a maternal bovine appeasing substance (BAS). The pheromone in question is found naturally in cows to calm offspring: stressful situations include weaning, castration, and transport. The substance was synthesized by several companies; one product in the US is sold under the brand name FerAppease®. It is comprised of a proprietary formula of fatty acids.

Pheromones can be released in secretions in urine, manure, saliva, skin, or specialized scent glands. Appeasing pheromones were first discovered in pigs. These pheromones are released by sows and can calm aggression and reduce fighting behavior. It was commercially synthesized and has had similar results on commercial farms.

I reviewed some research articles that used similar procedures. Prior to stressful events, BAS (5 ml dose) was applied to the nuchal skin area on necks of the treatment group animals. The control group received a placebo, the carrier agent or water. The stressful events included weaning, transport (to a feedlot or to slaughter), moving to a new feeding location (confinement to pasture).

One study looked at weaning, a very stressful time for calves. Calves were separated, given vaccine boosters. The treatment group had the application of BAS and control group had the placebo. The calves were transported to a new location (using different trailers) and given a new diet in confinement pens. Blood haptoglobin levels, a protein produced in the liver of sick or stressed animals, were measured.

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Ask Extension: What is FerAppease®? Does it Work? Cont.

Blood draw in itself can be a stressful procedure and may confuse trial results. Cortisol levels were measured by collecting hairs from the tail switch; this is less stressful, but still required handling to accomplish. Behavior was also measured, in respect to handling system restraint and exit velocity. Pens were separated to prevent the control group's exposure to BAS.

Results showed that BAS increased daily gain for the first 28 days, but there was no difference in gain at 42 days. Interestingly, higher immune responses from the vaccine were noted in the blood from the BAS treatment group. Also, exit velocity from the chute was greater in day 14 with the control group. Observations were the BAS group seemed to adapt to the new environment sooner than the control group.

In another weaning study, calves were divided into two groups, BAS and control. In this study BAS calves had better gain through the 45-day period. In a feedlot study, 27-month-old bulls were divided into two groups. The BAS group had better weight gain for the first 15 days, but benefits were not sustained through the remainder of the trial.

A slaughter study was conducted where one group of finished cattle was treated with BAS prior to shipment to slaughter, the other group had the placebo. The pH of the meat at the 12th rib was analyzed and the pH was higher for the control group, at higher risk of dark, firm, and dry meat (dark cutter).

All studies indicated more research was needed. One study noted there was an approximate 15-day effectiveness. There are many possibilities for a substance such as this to calm animals in a multitude of situations. Potential uses noted in promotional material included castration and dehorning; pain management is still needed but use of BAS may assist in calming the calves afterward. The current cost per 5 ml (1 tsp) dose is $1.50. There is no withdrawal time. Use at weaning, vaccination, and other times may be justified with current beef prices. As the articles noted, more research is needed on this interesting product.

Cash Rent and Custom Harvest Fee Survey! We Need Your Input!

CCE Regional Business Management Specialists are working on a grant to collect Cash Rent and Custom Harvest Fee survey data from farms across New York. To date, there is limited information available about rental rates and fees for crop harvesting. Farms can use this valuable information for their farm business planning to help improve decision making and profitability.

The data that is collected, and the subsequent reports/findings/resources will help us answer your calls asking things like "what's the average rental rate in my area" and "how much do people charge to combine oats".

To fill out the survey, please visit: https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2o84CbMn2X-TeeuW.
For more information, visit: https://farmbusiness.cornell.edu/cashrates/

Performance of NYS Dairy Farm Businesses in 2023 – Preliminary Results

John Hanchar

At this point, consider these results preliminary -- the sample size will increase over the next months prior to final reporting of results.

Summary

• Milk receipts net of milk marketing expenses per hundredweight (cwt.) fell 18 percent to $20.73 per cwt. in 2023, while milk sold per cow averaged 27,000 pounds, an increase of 1 percent relative to the 2022 value.
• In 2023, the total cost of producing a cwt. of milk was $23.44, an increase of $0.32 per cwt. relative to 2022.
• As of February 3, 2024, results suggest that the same 31 New York dairy farms in Cornell University Cooperative Extension's Dairy Farm Business Summary (DFBS) Program realized lower levels of profit in 2023 compared to 2022 -- for example, for 2023, the rate of return on all assets without appreciation averaged 3.7 percent compared to 12.4 percent in 2022.

Introduction

On February 3, 2024, Jason Karszes, Cornell College of Agriculture & Life Sciences/PRO-DAIRY published early, state level 2023 DFBS results. Results reported here represent averages for the same 31 New York dairy farms cooperating in 2022 and 2023. The DFBS Program uses a whole farm approach to calculate operating, purchased input, and total cost of producing milk per cwt. measures, subtracting accrual non milk operating receipts from accrual operating, purchased input, and total expenses, costs.

Size of Business and Rates of Production

• Average number of cows per farm rose from 1,010 in 2022 to 1,050 in 2023.
• Milk sold per farm increased from 27,047,820 pounds in 2022 to 28,347,940 in 2023.
• Milk sold per cow averaged 27,000 pounds in 2023 compared to 26,772 in 2022.
• Worker equivalents per farm averaged 18.9 in 2023 compared to 18.5 in 2022.
• Hay dry matter harvested per acre fell 3.3 to 3.2 tons, while corn silage harvested per acre increased 10 percent to 20.3 tons per acre in 2023.

Income Generation

• Milk receipts net of milk marketing expenses per hundredweight (cwt.) decreased from $25.30 to $20.73.
• Milk receipts net of milk marketing expenses per cow fell from $6,775 in 2022 to $5,597 in 2023, a decrease of 17.4 percent.

Cost Control

• Dairy feed and crop expense per cwt. of milk rose from $9.54 in 2022 to $9.64 in 2023, an increase of 1 percent.
• In 2023, total cost of producing a cwt. of milk averaged $23.44, an increase of 1 percent relative to the 2022 value of $23.12.

Profitability

• Net farm income without appreciation per cwt. of milk averaged $2.03 in 2023, a decline of 69 percent compared to 2022.
• Rate of return on equity capital without appreciation fell from 15.9 percent in 2022 to 3.1 percent in 2023.
• In 2023, the rate of return on all assets without appreciation was 3.7 percent, a decrease of 70 percent relative to 2022.

Final Thoughts

Sound farm financial management practices are key to achieving farm business objectives and goals. Financial summary & analysis help answer:

• Where is the business now financially?
• Where do you want it to be?
• How will you get the business to where you want it to be financially?

For example, owners of dairy farm businesses cooperate in Cornell University Cooperative Extension's DFBS Program for purposes of identifying strengths, and possible areas for improvement by comparing their results to results of other cooperators and evaluating progress towards goals.

If you are interested in improving your farm business' ability to practice sound financial management, then please call or message us – for contact information, please see information at the front of this newsletter. Owners of all types of farm businesses are encouraged to contact us. The NWNY team has the capacity and desire to work with a variety of farm businesses -- dairy (small, medium, and large; conventional; organic; grazing; and others), field crop, livestock, and others.

Nutrient Management Considerations for Spring

Jodi Letham

According to the Northeast Regional Climate Center, in January, the Northeast saw its 17th warmest month since records began in 1895, with an average temperature of 28.0 degrees F, which is 4.0 degrees F higher than the typical average. January was characterized by moderate temperatures and heavy rainfall, with varying levels of snowfall from several large storms.

The fertilizer projections for 2024 seem to be more economical compared to the prices observed in 2023.

Regardless of whether you are a farmer, retailer, advisor, or service provider, as an ag professional, our daily focus is on how to address questions like "which seed will perform best this year?" and "what fertilizer program is necessary for the crop to reach its full yield potential?" It's usually advisable to begin with current soil test analysis and base your fertility strategy on the results of your soil tests. When soils test medium or lower, phosphorus, potassium, and zinc are most likely to limit crop productions. The likelihood of obtaining a response from a nutrient application where the soil test indicates a level over optimal is low. The rate at which a soil test values go down is slow, so not applying fertilizer for a year probably won't cause a big enough drop to need a lot more fertilizer the next year. Using variable rate technology (VRT) to apply the optimal amount of fertilizers and the ideal seeding rate can increase your yield per acre while minimizing product waste. By tailoring crop nutrition and seeding rates to each zone, you can take full advantage of every opportunity.

Starter fertilizers are most effective when the crop is planted into cold, wet soils, irrespective of the total fertility level of the soil. Springtime soils are often cold and wet, reducing root growth, nutrient mobility, and nutrient mineralization. Due to the insulating effect of the surface mulch, soils in reduced tillage systems are typically cooler and wetter than conventional tillage systems making a starter fertilizer just as important, if not more so. For in-furrow fertilizer application, it is essential to use lower rates to prevent crop damage. Banding fertilizer to the side of the row with the planter gives farmers more flexibility in rate and years when planned broadcast applications cannot be applied.

Note that because phosphorus and potassium fertilizers are water-soluble and will move with water, they should not be used in circumstances where runoff is anticipated. It is essential to remain attentive to field conditions in the interest of protecting your fertilizer investment. Knowing whether fertilizer is necessary will help you determine the best course of action if fields remain wet for lengthy periods, which could postpone planting.

Attend our Fertility Training Program on Friday, April 5, 2024, to learn more about liquid and dry fertilizer, and lime being held at the Hotel Canandaigua, Tapestry Collection by Hilton 205 Lakeshore Dr, Canandaigua, NY 14424!

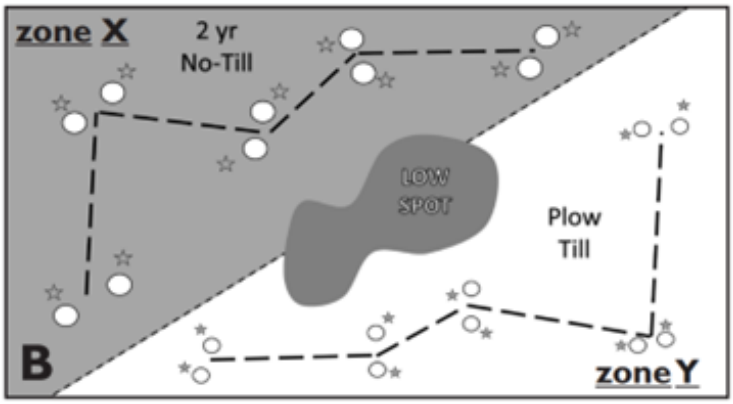


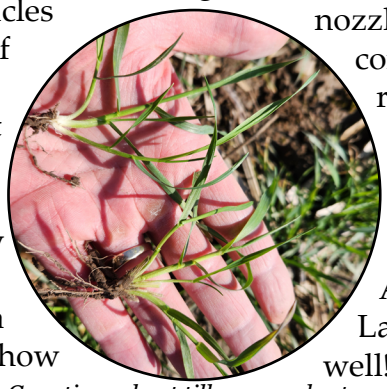
Figure 1: Sampling areas with uneven crop performance or for comparing zones, 'X' vs. 'Y'. Source: Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health - soilhealth.cals.cornell.edu

Are You Ready for Winter Wheat?

Mike Stanyard

In my article last month, I tried to give everyone an idea about how our wheat crop looked going into 2024. With the lack of snow, it has been easier to do some windshield scouting and see how our crop is faring. The periods of warm weather throughout February and early March woke up the wheat a couple times and then put it back to bed again. Overall, the wheat crop looked good as of mid-March and much of it had a good green color. I know that some dry nitrogen was applied early. It is important to have a little nitrogen available as soon as it wakes back up. The periods of nice weather have given everyone ample opportunities to walk some wheat fields and do a little antler hunting. Once we confirm that the plant stand looks good, we need to assess tiller numbers to determine nitrogen amount and timing.

Tiller Counts and Nitrogen. In past articles I have discussed counting the number of tillers to determine if you should put all your nitrogen up front at green up, split it into two applications, or put it all on at Feekes Stage 6 (jointing). I'm sure many of you have already assessed how many plants and tillers you have per square yard. If you have not and need a refresher course, see my short video on how to do so, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFfJ0me-OzY&list=PLBMGyz-Tr13dsj4Ufdu6Dle2AJtGJbyo6z&index=7 , on the NWNY Team's YouTube channel.



Counting wheat tillers per plant. Photo: M. Stanyard

See chart as example of tiller number and N timing and amounts. If your plant/tiller counts are low, be prepared to get more N on early as wheat plants green up fast and need to be fed. This N is utilized to increase vegetative production and promote additional tillers. This will be crucial on the later planted fields that did not have any fall tillers. Unfortunately, spring tillers will not yield as well as fall tillers. If tiller counts are in the middle, then get some N on early and the remainder on at jointing. If tiller counts are high, hold off on applying N at green-up and apply it all at jointing. This later N application timing should coincide with stem elongation which means nitrogen is going towards increasing the number of seeds per head and seed size. I know some growers that apply 20-25 pounds of N early even if their tiller count is adequate, to protect against the potential yield loss from a delayed application due to wet soil conditions.

Spring Weed Control. We had a wet fall in 2023 and I saw very few fields that had fall herbicide applications. I think that fall spraying is a huge advantage as you never know what the weather will be like in the spring and timely weed control can be tricky. If you did not get it done, remember that the earliest planted fields can be full of winter annual weeds: purple deadnettle, chickweed, chamomile, and marestail. Adding Huskie to a Harmony Extra program has been a good mix to take out marestail in the fall or spring. Utilize Osprey Xtra if roughstalk bluegrass is starting to become an issue on your farm. We are still encouraging that you do not mix your herbicide and nitrogen applications and spray separately. The leaf burning can cost you up to 8 bushels and could get worse as temperatures increase. Stream bars and nozzles have been a game changer when it comes to liquid nitrogen application and reducing leaf burn.

National Wheat Contest. Every year I encourage growers to enter the National Wheat Contest hosted by the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG). Last year we had two growers do very well! If you are interested in signing up for the contest, viewing the rules or checking out last year's winners, visit the National Wheat Foundation's web page at https://www.yield-contest.wheatfoundation.org/. Entry deadline is May 15. Give me a call if you have any questions.

Tiller Number (per sq. yard)	Nitrogen Recommendation
< 300	up to 60 units of N at green up, rest applied at GS 5-6
450-600	Up to 45 units of N at green up, rest applied at GS 5-6
>700	No N at green up*, all N applied at GS 5-6 * Some growers are applying 20-25 lbs.

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2020 JOHN DEERE 6250 ULTIMATE TRACTOR PACKAGE; MFWD Tractor w/Full Suspension Cab; IVT 31 MPH Trans.; Auto-Track Ready; Front & Rear PTO's and 3-Point Hitch; 600/70R30 Front Tires, 710/70R42 Rears - Both at 100%; 2 Front SCV's; 4 Rear SCV's; Premium Seat; 3,057 Hours; Stk. # 6250R - **$184,900**

2019 JOHN DEERE 6130M MVWD 130HP TRACTOR; Enclosed Cab; Power Quad Trans.; 12K Front Weight; 3 SCV's; 480/70R24 Front Tires; 520/70R38 Rears; 540/1000 PTO; Outside 3-Point Hitch Control; Air Ride Seat, Suspension Cab; 1,783 Hours - **$85,000**

2017 JOHN DEERE 6195R; 195HP MFWD Tractor w/Full Suspension Cab; Front & Rear 3-Point Hitches; PTO's; 540/65R30 Front Tires; 650/65R42 Rears both at 70%; IVT Transmission; 4 SCV's; Monitor GPS Ready; 2, 969 Hours - **$139,900**

2006 WESTERN STAR 4900 CAB & CHASSIS; Clean, Heavy Single Frame; 430 HP CAT C13; 18-Spd. Manual; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; AirLiner Susp.; 3.91 Ratio; 316" WB; 216" CT; 26' Frame Behind Cab; PTO; 3278,770 Miles; Stk. # 6854 - **$62,500**

2009 INTERNATIONAL PAYSTAR 5600i; Cummins 430 HP; Engine Brake; Alison Automatic Trans.; 20K F/A; 65K Rears; Hendrickson Spring; 244" WB; PTO; Double Frame; Supreme 1400T Tailgate Chute; (2) Mixing Augers; Wide Rear Conveyor; 35,054 Miles; Stk. # 6901 - **$119,500**

2008 PETERBILT 365 TANK TRUCK; Double Frame w/4,400 Gal. Steel Tank; Cummins 410 HP; 13-Spd.; 14.6K F/A; 44K Full Locking Rears on Air Trac Susp.; 228" WB; 156" CT; 21' Frame Behind Cab; PTO; 529,094 Miles; Stk. # 6857 - **$44,900**

2000 PETERBILT 357 w/KUHN KNIGHT VT180 VERTICAL FEED MIXER; Truck Scale System; Cummins ISM (Recent In-Frame Overhaul); Allison Auto. (Reman Weller Trans.); 20K F/A; 46K Rears; 397,000 Miles; 6,889 Hours; Stk. # 6829 - **$83,900**

2006 PETERBILT 357 CAB & CHASSIS; 335 HP CAT C11; Allison Auto. Trans.; 20K F/A; 46K Locking Rears; Chalmers Susp.; 254" WB; 170" CT; 21'6" Frame Behind Cab; 205,344 Miles; Stk. # 6822 - **$56,900**

2009 KENWORTH T800 CAB & CHASSIS; Clean Double Frame; 355 HP Cummins ISM (Can Be Re-Rated To 425 HP); 18-Spd. Manual; 264" WB; 21' Frame Behind Cab; 186" CT; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears On Neway Air Ride; 4.30 Ratio; PTO w/Controls; 107,210 Miles; Stk. # 6778 - **$54,900**

2015 KENWORTH T800 CAB & CHASSIS; TRI-DRIVE; 550 HP Cummins IX; 18-Spd. Manual; Double Frame; 48" Flat Top Bunk; 354" Bridge Measurement; Air Ride; 25'8" Frame Behind Cab; 18K F/A; 69K Full Locking Rears; 4.30 Ratio; 310,693 Miles; Stk. # 6776 - **$85,900**

2013 PETERBILT 367 DAYCAB; Very Clean; 390 HP Cummins ISX; Allison Auto. Trans.; 212" WB; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; Wetline; Air Trac Susp.; 18,400 lb. Chassis Weight; 15' Frame Behind Cab; 130" CT; 213,229 Miles; Stk. # 6768 - **$74,900**

2004 VOLVO VHD64 CAB & CHASSIS; Heavy Single Frame; Volvo 365 HP; Allison Auto. Trans.; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; T-Ride Susp.; 214" WB; 150" CT; 18'6" Frame; 153,968 Miles; Stk. # 6758 - **$44,900**

2014 PETERBILT 367 DOUBLE FRAME SLEEPER TRUCK; 48" Flat Top Sleeper; 550 HP Cummins ISX Engine; 18-Spd. Manual; 14.32K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; Neway Susp.; 232" WB; 436,000 Miles; Stk. # 6794 & 6795 - **$51,900 EACH**

2002 STERLING LT9500 CRANE TRUCK; w/IMT24562 Knuckle Boom Crane; 350 HP Cummins ISM; 8LL Trans.; 62' Reach/5,000 lbs. Lift Capacity; 24'6" Steel Flatbed; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; Steerable Lift Axle; T-Ride Susp.; 270" WB; 30' Frame Behind Cab; 208" CT; 181,868 Miles; Stk. # 6750 - **$51,900**

2015 FREIGHTLINER 114SD TRI-DRIVE VAC TRUCK with Vac-Con System; 470 HP Detroit DD13; Eaton Fuller Auto. Trans.; Dumping Tank; Fresh Water Tanks; Dynablast 420,000 BTU Boiler; Telescopic Boom w/8" Suction Hose; 20K F/A; 69K Locking Rears; AirLiner Susp.; 4.56 Ratio; 160,524 Miles; Stk. # 6917 - **$129,900**

2015 WESTERN STAR 4700SF; Detroit DD13 470 HP; 10-Spd. Manual; Clean Daycab with 12K Front Axle; 46K Full Locking Rears; AirLiner Suspension; 210" WB; Headache Rack; 3.91 Ratio, 391,389 Miles; Stk. #6798 - **$59,900**

2012 MACK LEU613 PACKER; Double Frame; Labrie Side Load Packer; 20K F/A; 46K Rears; Haulmaax Susp.; Allison Auto. Trans.; LH/RH Side Drives; 212" WB; 180" CT; 20'6" Frame Behind Cab if the Packer is Removed. ***HP Can Be Increased to 395-425 with Software Flash,*** 59,375 Miles/13,276 Hours - **$48,850**

2003 KENWORTH T800 FLATBED; Heavy Single Frame; 395 HP CAT C12; Allison Auto. Trans.; 15'6" x 102" Steel Deck; 18K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears On Haulmaax Susp.; 196" WB; 122" CT; 14'8" Frame Behind Cab; 4.56 Ratio; 233,014 Miles; Stk. # 6767 - **$58,900**

2011 WESTERN STAR 4900; 485 HP Cummins ISX; Allison 4500RDS Auto. Trans.; Double Frame Fuel & Lube Truck w/2,000 Gal. Fuel Tank; (5) Oil Tanks; (1) Waste Oil Tank; Oil Recovery System; Air Compressor; Hose Reels; Fire Supression System; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; Chalmers Susp.; 5.38 Ratio; 280" WB; 208" CT; 22' Frame Behind Cab; 33,398 Miles; Stk. # 6900 - **$92,900**

2007 PETERBILT 378 DUMP TRUCK; Double Frame; 475 HP CAT C15; 18-Spd. Manual; 20' Steel Body w/44" Side; Tarp; 20K F/A; 46K Full Locking Rears; Air Trac Susp.; Non-Steerable 20K Lift Axle; 266" WB; 463,988 Miles; Stk. # 6862 - **$54,900**

2009 INTERNATIONAL 5600i w/National 600E Crane; Cummins 425 HP; Allison Auto.; Full Lockers; 20K F/A; 46K Rears; Air Ride Susp.; 250" WB; PTO; Double Frame; 20-Ton Capacity Crane; 27 ft. - 66 ft. Section Boom; 25,576 Miles; 2,168 Hours; Stk. # 6915 - **$93,900**

2000 OSHKOSH; Detroit Diesel V8 500 HP Turbo Diesel Engine; Engine Brake; Automatic Trans.; 86,000 lb. GVWR; Two 55,000 lb. Winches; Aux. Winch; 8x8; Rear Wheel Steer; Exhaust Brake; Air Ride Susp.; PTO; Fifth Wheel Ramp Plates; Central Tire Inflation System; Stk. # 6696 - **$78,500**

1999 INTERNATIONAL PAYSTAR 5000 DOUBLE FRAME DAYCAB; Cummins N14 370+ HP; Allison Auto. Trans.; 184" WB; NEWAY Air Ride; Wetline; Rubber 95%; 90,427 Miles; Stk. # 6745 - **$39,900**

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Make Farm Employee Housing Your Biggest Benefit

Kaitlyn Lutz

On Tuesday, March 12th, Cornell's Ag Workforce Development hosted its first Housing Summit. The event brought together key stakeholders throughout the agricultural sector including dairy co-operative leaders, government officials including Commissioner Ball, leaders from the Department of Labor and the Department of Health, farmers, and others. The main objectives were:

1. Organize industry leaders.
2. Identify the most pertinent issues and root causes of problems related to farm-provided employee housing.
3. Identify any preliminary action plans to move forward.

Libby Eiholzer, Cargill, began the summit with a presentation on housing in rural Guatemala. This eye-opening presentation brought cultural differences in housing standards to the forefront of the conversation. She stressed the need to train employees on how to properly use and care for their on-farm housing, stating that common sense is not common when you come from a different background. I see this same need ringing loud and clear when conducting on-farm meetings and talking to employees about housing.

If you have not grown up with indoor plumbing, heating, air conditioning or an electric or gas stove how could you understand how to use and care for one? This is the reality for many of our farm employees. Discussing one of the commonly cited issues we hear about- toilet paper being thrown in the trash bin- Lisa Ford of Cayuga Marketing remembered that it took her months to remember to throw toilet paper into the toilet after moving home from living in Guatemala for two years.

Most of the root causes of housing deficiencies that surfaced through breakout groups during the summit came back to training and education. However, it wasn't just training employees, it was also training and educating our local elected officials on the various visa programs (H2A, H2B etc.) and associated housing requirements as well as the considerations farmers have when providing employee housing in our region.

Ag Workforce Development recently updated some resources that can greatly assist producers in managing farm-provided employee housing. One very useful resource is the recently published Farm Provided Employee Housing Guide, which provides information on every aspect of employee housing from best practices for orientation to regulatory requirements.

I would highly recommend anyone housing employees to print this guide and keep it on hand as a resource. Other useful resources such as a housing checklist, self-assessment, pest management and more can be found at the Agricultural Workforce Development website.

I am seeing a real opportunity for employers to communicate the value of housing to their employees at this time more than ever. As many employers consider decreasing work hours due to the NY overtime regulations, we must be communicating each and every benefit we provide to employees. Most employees that I speak with are not aware of the true cost of housing. One dairy farm owner present at the Housing Summit noted that one of their employees who moved to their farm from California stated his net income had increased since moving to NY due to the value of farm-provided housing, this was despite being paid over $20/hr in California.

If you have thoughts on other helpful resources we can provide or would like to be part of future meetings focused on farm-provided employee housing, please reach out.

Farm Provided Employee Housing Guide
https://cornell.app.box.com/s/hlziw91rjz83q7pe7ad1cihbu3j6y4nx

Agricultural Workforce Development
https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/worker-housing/

"La Pila", or water basin, represents the only running water in this rural Guatemalan household. Photo credit Libby Eiholzer.

A Systems Approach to Heifer Enterprise Management

Margaret Quaassdorff

How do your farm's replacement heifers make it to your milking string, and who are they? On many dairy farms it is as simple as the cow has a calf that is raised and enters the herd at around the age of 2 years. But what happens in between? What should happen in between to ensure that the future dairy herd meets its highest potential, and how do we know that it gets done correctly?

Within your dairy system, look at the way you raise your replacement heifers as an entire system on its own. Operations management involves analyzing components of that system, which has many levels of decision-making, goal setting, evaluation, and adjustment of approach. The targeted outcome of the system is the creation of an end-product that is a high-quality, healthy cow that reaches her highest genetic potential; one that was efficiently raised and contributes to the profitability of the herd as soon as possible.

Cost: From a 2019 Cornell PRO-DAIRY study of 26 well-run herds in NY, we know that the total investment for raising a heifer averaged $2,505 per animal with feed (46%) and labor (~13.2%) making up almost 60% of the cost. Today, that percentage is still probably similar, but the cost is likely higher due to increased feed prices and updated labor laws. So, with a significant investment per heifer, it literally pays to try to maximize the potential in each heifer.

Epigenetics and Potential: The potential of the heifer is set by her genetic code, and epigenetics is essentially how the animal's genes are influenced to show up in her phenotype. This starts at conception and is influenced early on in utero with how the dam is managed. From there, the management decisions we make for that calf including nutrition, and factors associated with the environment either maintain that genetic potential or take away from it. If you are interested in hearing more on this topic, you can listen to our podcast episode from "Dialing into Your Best Dairy" Dr. Mike VanAmburgh of Cornell University on SoundCloud.

Nutrition: From other studies, we know growth rate in the milk feeding phase of a calf's life accounts for more variation in 1st lactation milk production than any other variable. And we know that feeding a high plane of nutrition and investing early into these heifers gives us a higher quality, more efficient, and profitable heifer. Cattle partition nutrients differently as they age. Before puberty, heifers will prioritize their nutrients for developing frame and putting on muscle. Post-puberty, a heifer's metabolism switches up, and leans more towards putting on fat. It is rare that compensatory growth pays. Knowing this, we can use the calfhood time to really feed them well so that they grow more quickly and reach a larger size at breeding age. A larger animal at breeding age will get you closer to that target benchmark of 85% of mature body weight at calving. This is important because first lactation cows are still growing, and that growth inhibits their milk production. If they need to do too much growing after calving, they are less profitable than their peers that reached the 85% growth benchmark, and significantly less profitable than a mature cow.

Stay tuned for Part II, where we will talk about inventory management and strategy.

2019 Cornell PRO-DAIRY study
https://dyson.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/02/EB_2020-08_Dairy_Replacement_Costs_Writeup_Final1_revised-VD.pdf

Podcast
https://soundcloud.com/user-301921459-118136586/e1-dialing-into-your-best-dairy-reaching-your-herds-genetic-potential?in=user-301921459-118136586/sets/dialing-into-your-best-dairy

Your heifer replacement enterprise is a system within the larger system of your dairy. Avoiding misplaced economic decision-making helps the entire system make progress toward the dairy farm's goals. Photo by M. Quaassdorff.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 8-9

Herd Health and Nutrition Conference presented by PRO-DAIRY and NEAFA

Doubletree by Hilton, East Syracuse, NY

Registration:
https://cals.cornell.edu/pro-dairy/events-programs/conferences-seminars/herd-health-and-nutrition-conference

April 9

Agritourism Webinar: Working with your Local Tourism Office

12PM - 1PM : Zoom : Free

Registration:
https://nwnyteam.cce.cornell.edu/events.php

April 11

Livestock Grazing for Beginners

6:30PM : CCE Niagara 4-H Training Center: $10

Registration:
https://cceniagaracounty.org/events/2024/04/11/livestock-grazing-for-beginners

April 25

Cornell Cow Convos Podcast Episode 8: Automated Health Monitoring Systems

Release for listening

Listen Here:
https://nwnyteam.cce.cornell.edu/events.php

Make sure your employees are aware of the solar eclipse!

Wear glasses. Be prepared to stay safe when moving animals in the dark.

Share this video to explain the eclipse and what to expect to your Spanish-speaking employees:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL79cOCpDoQ