

Arizona DHIA
Phone: 480-894-0156

Dairy Lab Services
Phone: 563-557-7421

Dairy One Cooperative Inc.
Phone: 607-257-1272

DHI Cooperative Inc.
Phone: 800-DHI-OHIO

Idaho DHIA
Phone: 208-733-6372, ext. 104

Indiana State Dairy Assn.
Phone: 765-494-8025

Lancaster DHIA
Phone: 717-665-5960

Louisiana DHIA
Phone: 225-578-6099

Minnesota DHIA
Phone: 763-682-1091

NorthStar Cooperative
DHI Services
Phone: 800-471-3716

Puerto Rico DHIA
Phone: 787-796-4500

Rocky Mountain DHIA
Phone: 435-797-0133

San Joaquin DHIA
Phone: 209-824-7790

Southeast DHIA
Phone: 352-392-5592

Tennessee DHIA
Phone: 865-974-7289

Texas DHIA
Phone: 254-968-6529

United Federation of DHIAs
Phone: 540-552-2541

Vermont DHIA
Phone: 800-639-8067

Washington State DHIA
Phone: 360-755-0375

Got dairy data?

Dairy cows on farms today are identified in many different manners. This has evolved from a name on each cow with lots of "Daisies" and famous names like "Elsie." These names were easy to remember in small herds with the same people handling and milking the cows every day. Larger herds, freestall housing and more complex milking parlors make identification (ID) by name almost impossible on today's dairies. There may be some special cows that still have names, but a numbering system has to be the basis of identification in everyday management and data collection.

Animal identification for milk recording, management, genetics, breed associations and animal health is the foundation of any of these programs. There are many methods and technologies that can be used to identify animals. This includes numbered metal tags or plastic ear tags, all the way to electronic identification methods that are rapidly changing. Many modern management and milking systems have animal identification captured at every milking.

In the DHI system Uniform Operating Procedure, it is required that every milking animal have readable identification on DHI test day. This is just something that is common sense for any dairy producer and operation of the dairy.

Need ID to measure to manage

Years ago, there were different phrases to bring home the idea that you needed good animal identification as the foundation of any records program in the dairy industry. Then, you needed to measure milk yield and fat, plus various traits and feedstuff intake to manage the cow or group of cows. This also allowed for genetic gain through AI use and production gains through yield monitoring. The gains were driven by knowing what a cow produced or what AI sires were in the pedigree.

Even today, any management or genetic gains can still only be as good as the identification of the cow. You can't manage the cow or keep the

best replacement animals when you don't know the animal's identity and its offspring. This makes good identification and usable identification the foundation of management, genetic and breed association programs.

Usable ID

The start of usable ID is a good identification system that can be read visibly and/or electronically. It is important that IF an animal has to have more than one identification number, the numbers are cross referenced and the primary identification number ties everything together. The U.S. dairy industry has been working on getting a single, unique animal identification number (AIN) for the last 20 years. Several attempts and "almost" implementations have occurred. But as of 2011, government regulators (USDA and state animal health groups), industry marketing groups (livestock marketers or dealers) and actual dairy farms have not been able to get agreement on a single program to move this forward. So, "Daisy" will probably have several pieces of ID – even in the near future – until the United States can implement an animal identification system.

Usable ID for genetics

To get usable ID for genetic programs is one aspect of genetic progress. What is valid cow identification?

- Standard Series number with state-alpha-animal number, for example, 35XYZ1234
- American ID with 9-digit numeric, for example, 623654321
- AIN with 15-digit numeric (3 country code digits and 12 animal ID digits), for example, 840000623654321

Keeping these IDs and other computer numbers or visual ID tied together is a data collection and handling challenge that is done every day on dairies and the data flow system of DHI and USDA-Animal Improvement Programs Laboratory (AIPL) for genetic and management calculations and benchmarks.

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In addition to good cow ID, valid sire ID is required to support the genetic system and herd replacements. This requires a National Association of Animal Breeders Code, such as 029HO55667 (3-digit AI organization code; 2 alpha breed code like HO or JE; and then a unique 5-digit bull number). This number can then be cross referenced to the breed registration number or American ID of the AI bull. This can occur at the dairy records processing center or at USDA-AIPL to get the sire information for the calculation of the genetic evaluation.

ID: foundation for progress

Accurate cow ID and sire ID are the foundation for progress in management and genetics of U.S. dairy herds. There are not definitive numbers, but a large amount of computer and people time is spent every day working on ID error handling and correction through the dairy records system. This



Electronic ear tags and readers enhance cow identification on today's dairies.

is handled by dairy records providers, with help from AI companies and breed associations, but is still best and generally needs to be handled on the farm. The closer to the cow, the easier and faster the ID can be verified,

and any updates or edits can be efficiently handled.

Each animal ID and sire ID has an impact on DHI herds and their management and genetic results. All animals and management and genetic decisions impact a dairy's success. When added together throughout a herd, these decisions make a difference on the dairy's progress and bottom line. The importance of good identification and the work and efforts of the DHI system and its participants yield numerous benefits realized every day at the farm level. It does make a difference that good ID options are available. This allows the "Got Dairy Data" system to provide benefits and realize the system is a cooperative effort that starts with something as simple as good ID on each dairy cow.



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