Got Dairy Data?  
DHI Serves Herds of All Sizes and Plans in 2013

Service not Size is the Key

Dairy Herd Information (DHI) participation offers opportunities to herds of all sizes by providing management information for decision making on the dairy farm operation. Some think DHI is only for small farms, registered breeders or because my family wants to be recognized for production awards at the annual banquet. Those are not the only farms participating in today’s DHI programs as DHI has a wide reach of service for farms of all sizes and facilities. Flexibility for participation in DHI has been occurring over time but particularly during the last 20 years. Innovation to interface with new technology has been embraced by DHI service providers and Dairy Records Processing Centers today. Positioning data capture and processing for the future is occurring every day at cow side and throughout the DHI system. Listening and preparing for this future is a key effort of the programs in the DHI System.

Looking at the 2013 DHI system participation demographics shows this broad reach across all sizes of dairy farm operations. In 2013, of the 4.4 million cows participating in DHI programs going into the industry database, 14.6% were in herds with less than 100 milking cows; 19.3% were in herds from 100 to 299 milking cows; 17.9% were in herds from 300 to 749 milking cows; 23.3% were in herds from 750 to 1999 milking cows and 24.9% were in herds greater than 2000 milking cows. This look across participation by herd sizes shows that one-size does not fit all. DHI works with herds of different sizes to meet the needs of the farmer who is the customer of DHI. Figure 1.

This diverse DHI customer base creates a number of challenges for providing data collection and for processing of data and maintaining standards for and quality of the data. It is important for dairy herd managers, veterinarians and nutritionists to know that data quality and standards are in place for these data used in decision making and management. This allows the DHI dairy farm participants and allied industry cooperators to know the DHI data have a quality basis as these data are used and analyzed with little concern regarding farm size, housing or type of milking system in place.

Everyone recognizes dairy farm numbers are shrinking over time, but cow numbers are not shrinking as fast or are remaining stable during this time of dairy farm number reduction. From 2000 to 2013, the average size of a herd participating in DHI has increased 128%. This change from 73.3 cows per DHI herd in 2000 to 167.8 cows per herd parallels the dairy farm evolution everyone has seen and talked about during this period. DHI has adapted to serve this changing dairy farm production base. What happens with these dairy farm numbers and average cow per farm shift is changing how the cow and customer is serviced. Figure 2.

Test Plans

In reviewing the different test plans that
service these herds, there are four major areas of test plans that were in place in 2013. In each test plan area there are some different options [http://www.dhia.org/testplan.pdf], with the DHI system working to be flexible and inclusive to have test plans and options that fit the needs of the participants and cows. Keeping test day disruptions minimized to dairy farms is a key objective of the on-farm sample and data collection. 2013 test plan categories showed 57.3% of the herds in supervised plans; 23.1% of the herds in unsupervised plans; 16.1% of the herds in supervised DHIR (registered) plans and 3.5% of the herds in commercial testing plans. It is evident these testing plans meet data usage needs and availability for a wide range of decision making and marketing of animals without regard to the herd size. Figure 3.

Test Day Milk for 2013

A wide range of average milk production on a herd basis exists depending on farm management, breed of cow and geographical factors in the US dairy industry. Having that in mind, herds broken out by herd size in the DHI system during 2013 ranged from 62.6 pounds of milk to 80.3 pounds of milk per cow per day. Figure 4. DHI cows average more milk production across all herd sizes versus the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) US average of 56 pounds of milk per cow per day. Management and decision making play an important role in this greater milk production achieved by cows in the DHI system. Data collection is the starting point of being able to recognize this difference between DHI and non-DHI cows across any herd size.

Several Options Allow a Fit for All

DHI and Quality Certification allow for data collection and processing participation by dairy farms and industry cooperators at levels decided by the customer. The steps required are to use the DHI data if you are currently on DHI or find out about participating in the DHI system if you currently not on DHI. Continuing innovation makes DHI participation an opportunity to reach positive results from Return On Investment (ROI) and Value Of Information (VOI) for dairy farms regardless of geographic location and size of the dairy farm operation.

For more information about the QC Program and QCS, contact Steven Sievert, manager, QC Program, at 608-848-6455, ext. 113, e-mail: sjsievert@dhia.org, or Jay Mattison, administrator of QCS, ext. 111, e-mail: jmattison@dhia.org. Or log on to www.qualitycertification.com