Accurate records foster objective and profitable management decisions

First, those are the last four numbers in the herd code for Cabbi Farm. By now, our herd code, you can tell we’ve been on DHIA test for a long time,” says co-owner Dave White. “I’m 54 years old and I don’t recall a time when we didn’t utilize DHIA testing.”

The herd has been on test 50-plus years with Dairy One Cooperative (and its predecessors). “That’s a long time,” White adds. “Dairy One has given us no reason to change or to not test our herd. We have no complaints.”

Cabi Farm is a partnership between Dave White and his brother, Doug. Also, Dave’s son and son-in-law are full-time employees on the farm.

Monthly testing, 3X

During the month, a DHI-certified field technician weighs and takes milk samples from all lactating cows at Cabbi Farm, during one of a day’s milkings. The 210-cow herd hovers around a 30,000-pound rolling herd average for milk. Analyzing individual cow productivity, genetics and related management tactics, has helped the Whites reach this lofty herd average.

“DHIA testing is a lifeblood,” says Dave. “We use this information to find possibilities.”

Admittedly, other organizations and programs offer farm management data. Yet, the Whites stick with DHIA because it’s the “best source of on-farm information available,” according to Dave White. “While a half-century of service sounds like it could be tradition,” White says that Dairy One doesn’t rest on its laurels. “Dairy One is always looking for the next tool to assist dairy producers in enhancing their farming operations and business profitability.”

White cites the example of Dairy One’s partner program, Hinkleys’ DHI testing starts with monthly supervised milk testing by DHI services. Periodically, Hinckley reviews the death loss report. This helps him determine where he should focus his herd health efforts. “If there’s no issue and I discover that what I’m doing is right, then I capitalize on what’s working.”

Analyzing profitability

Unless you are monitoring, DHIA records help dairy producers analyze individual cow and herd profitability. For Hinckley, he asks, “Is that cow making me money?” If yes, he’s most apt to breed her back and build on her genetics. “If no, you need to cut your losses and remove that cow out from the herd.”

Combining DHIA records with DairyCamp 305 offers Hinckley to create herd management lists, such as animals to vaccinate. Generating lists helps with a variety of management activities, including pen moves, estrus synchronization protocols and timed artificial insemination programs.

In years past, Hinckley said that the timing of vaccinations wasn’t as precise as it is today on the family’s 400-cow dairy. “We used more of a ‘group mentality,’ rather than an ‘individual cow mentality.’” For example, if a vaccination was recommended for lactating cows, then many of the lactating cows received that vaccination on the same day—even if their stage of lactation was different. Hinckley then fine-tuned their protocols and now give vaccinations at a more precise time—when the vaccination is most likely to have optimal effectiveness.

They work closely with their veterinarian to chart the correct vaccination at the correct time.

Monitoring more than components

When dairy producers think of DHIA testing, they often think of milk samples being used to analyze fat, protein and somatic cell count. Yet, there’s so much more information available in that small vial, as the Hinckleys have discovered. As cows approach dry-off, they have the milk samples tested for Johne’s disease, bovine tuberculosis and the small intestine disease of ruminants.

Johne’s disease isn’t a big concern in our herd, but we want to stop it from starting,” says Hinckley. If they discover a Johne’s-positive cow, Hinckleys make one of two choices: cull the cow or do not feed milk from that cow to the herd. “We also pay close attention to shipping ‘positive’ milk or cattle,” says Hinckley. “Recording and monitoring treatments through accurate records will prevent this from happening.”

Besides quality products, Hinckley says preventing antibiotic residues—in milk and meat—is so important. “I don’t want to worry about shipping ‘positive milk or cattle,’ he says. “National DHIA and Minnesota DHIA have really ramped up dairy producers’ abilities to manage their dairy herds at an extremely high level,” says Hinckley. “Despite herds getting larger, DHIA tools and reports allow us to fine-tune treatment protocols on an individual basis.”

With 400 cows, Hinckley says they’re no way he can know everything he needs to know about each cow. Thus, he turns to DHIA data and the herd management program.

Preventing residue infraction

Speaking of remaining vital information, Hinckley says preventing antibiotic residues—in milk and meat—is so important. “I don’t want to worry about shipping ‘positive milk or cattle,’ he says. “National DHIA and Minnesota DHIA have really ramped up dairy producers’ abilities to manage their dairy herds at an extremely high level,” says Hinckley. “Despite herds getting larger, DHIA tools and reports allow us to fine-tune treatment protocols on an individual basis.”

Besides quality products, Hinckley says Minnesota DHIA provides training and implementation. “Employees are very helpful; they’ve always been very happy with their customer support. They’ve helped me a lot with developing protocols and scheduling tasks.”
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National Dairy Herd Information Association

Accurate records foster objective and profitable management decisions

0031. Those are the last four numbers in the herd code for Cabhi Farm, Clymer, N.Y. “By our herd code, you can tell we’ve been on DHI test for a long time,” says co-owner Dave White. “I’m 54 years old and I don’t recall a time when we didn’t utilize DHI testing.”

The herd has been on test 50-plus years with Dairy One Cooperative Inc. (and its predecessors). “That’s a long time,” White adds. “Dairy One has given us no reason to change or to not test our herd. We have no complaints.”

Cahbi Farm is a partnership between Dave White and his brother, Doug. Also, Dave’s son and son-in-law are full-time employees on the farm.

Monthly testing, 3X

Once a month, a Dairy One certified field technician weighs and takes milk samples from all lactating cows at Cabhi Farm, during one of a day’s milkings. The 210-cow herd hovers around a 30,000-pound rolling herd average for milk. Analyzing individual cow productivity, genetics and related management factors has helped the Whites reach this lofty herd average.

“DHI testing (all milkings are weighed and recorded) is the only way to accurately see how each cow is doing,” says White. “We use this information to objectively make individual cow management decisions, such as culling, breeding and treating.”

Furthermore, the Whites use DHI records and reports to monitor the successes and failures of treatment. “Any time we intervene, we want to know whether or not that treatment improved cow’s health and whether or not it was a good return on investment.”

White notes how DHI numbers help objective sort out cows that under produce and/or require intervention. “If we have to intervene (give treatment) two or three times, that cow may find herself on the culling list.”

According to White, DHIA offers several herd management lists that help them cost effectively manage their herd in a time-efficient manner. They often refer to the pregnancy check list – looking for open cows and heifers. “Our age-first-calving goal is 23 months of age,” says White. “DHI lists help us hit that target. Without these lists, we’d probably have some heifers and fall short of reaching this goal.”

DHI also offers a list of cows that should be considered for dry-off. “We check to see how much they’re producing and look at the projected calving date to determine our cows to dry-off list.” The system notes that accurate data help them make accurate dry-off decisions, which prevents dry periods that are too long or too short.

Admittedly, other organizations and programs offer farm management data. Yet, the Whites stick with DHIA because it’s the “best source of on-farm information available,” according to Dave White.

While a half century of service sounds like it could be “tradition,” White says that Dairy One doesn’t manage their dairy herds on a “set it and forget it” mentality. “We carefully review test results and then I capitalize on what’s working.”

Analyzing profitability

Monitoring more than components

When dairy producers think of DHI testing, they often think of milk samples being used to analyze fat, protein and somatic cell count. There’s much more information available in that small vial, as the Hinckleys have discovered. As cows approach dry-off, they have the milk samples tested for Johne’s disease, a chronic, contagious bacterial disease that affects the small intestine of ruminants. Johne’s disease isn’t a big concern in our herd, but we want to stop it from moving to the next generation,” says Hinckley. If they discover a Johnes’-positive cow, Hinckley makes one of two choices: cull the cow or do not feed colostrum from her.

As with Johnes’, Hinckley’s record all herd health events – from breeding to a case of mastitis – in Dicymp 305 and synchronize all DHI data collected through milk testing. “All cattle health and productivity information is automatically downloaded, so we have easy access to each cow’s record,” says Hinckley. “With 400 cows, Hinckley says there is no way he knows everything he needs to know about each cow. Thus, he turns to DHI data and the herd management program.

Preventing residue infraction

Speaking of remembering vital information, Hinckley says preventing antibiotic residues – in milk and meat – is so important. “I don’t want to worry about shipping ‘positive’ milk or cattle,” says Hinckley. “Recording and monitoring treatment through accurate records will prevent this from happening.”

While Hinckley doesn’t recall dairying without DHIA testing (even as a child), he says so much has changed. “National DHIA and Minnesota DHIA have really ramped up dairy producers’ abilities to manage their dairy herds at an extreme level,” says Hinckley. “They’ve helped us a lot with developing protocols and scheduling tasks.”