

Dairy One Technicians Receive Advanced Training - monitoring dairy herd performance and using Scout herd management software

On April 27 and 28th, eleven Dairy One technicians from across the Northeast met in Ithaca, New York. They met for two days of advanced training on using information to track herds' performances and on running Scout herd management software. "It's important that all Dairy One staff continue to find ways to keep learning and growing professionally. That can be especially tough for some of our veteran technicians. That's why we put together this advanced school", noted Dairy Management Resources Manager, Jack van Almelo.



"Super Stars of the testing world." Technicians attending the advanced technician-training program came from all over the region and represented some of the best technicians providing records services in the entire Northeast. Most of these technicians feel a little uncomfortable if we describe them as "Super Stars", but certainly the customers they serve appreciate the experience, concern, and knowledge these technicians bring to their job.

The group contained the following technicians.

Glen Foss, Strafford, NY
Dave Kennedy, Honesdale, PA
Bob Pinner, Whitney Point, NY
Jeff Smith, Adams, NY
Zoanne Toth, Norwich, Conn.
Scott Wineman, Youngwood, PA

Steve Hollowell, Granville, NY
Bob Ormsby, Lewisburg, PA
Dave Randall, Bainbridge, NY
Mark Spoor, Stanely, NY
Steve Wilson, E. Meredith, NY

Monitoring a Dairy Herd

There are a lot of different numbers thrown around when talking about dairy herds, and many of them are used in the wrong context. The session on herd monitoring first discussed the principles of good monitoring numbers and then reviewed some values and methods that are helpful for monitoring a dairy. For this section commands from Dairy Comp 305 were used.

Monitor vs. Describing

It is common for people to get confused between numbers that are used to decide to take an action from numbers that are good for describing what a herd has done. In this part of the training session technicians spent a good deal of time working on identifying the characteristics of good monitoring.

Days to first breeding is a great number to describe how a dairy has done at getting the first service delivered but it is terrible for determining if the manager should take action. Because the "Average Days to First Breeding" represents the average days in milk at first breeding for all animals since they last calved, it represents a long period of time. Regardless of how the herd is doing currently, the historical performance will mask the current performance. Further, the system ignores animals that have not yet had their first service, so if the system fails completely, it will not show up in the Days to First Breeding value. Once the system is fixed and all of those late animals get bred, the number will then go up and indicate there is a problem!

Rather than monitor first breeding by looking at the average days to first breeding, the class discussed the alternative of counting the number of animals more than 70 days in milk and not yet bred. Unlike the traditional average, this number goes up as soon as the breeding system breaks, and goes down as soon as it is fixed - and it can include a list of the very animals that you can make money on by getting bred.

Many traditional numbers are similar to Average Days to First Breeding. They describe a dairy's historical performance but are not appropriate for managing the herd. Another example we discussed was the average age at first calving. Not only does this value have the historical weight behind it to keep it from responding to current performance, but there is a big lag between the event we are trying to manage, and when we are measuring it. If we want to manage our heifer breeding program, the time\place to measure it is in our heifers that are not yet bred, not the ones we are calving 9 months down the road.

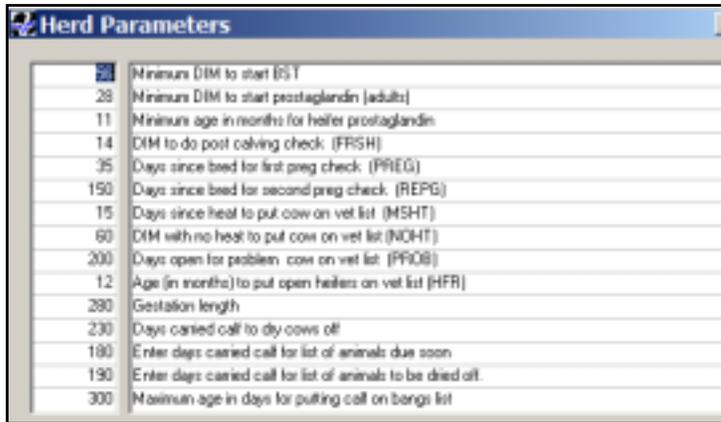


Dairy One technicians discussing ways to monitor a dairy herd to determine whether or not intervention is called for. Monitoring performance to decide if something should be changed is a lot different than describing how a dairy has been performing over the last year or so.

SCOUT, no-nonsense software

According to Jack van Almelo, Manager, Dairy Management Resources at Dairy One, Scout is the “Easiest to run, most complete, no-nonsense dairy management software available. Its great for tracking disease, production and managing reproduction on the typical dairy herd in the Northeast.”

In the second part of the advanced training technicians reviewed Scout’s basic operation and some of its special features including the vet list and vet check results entry functions, Monitor, and Pregnancy Risk. The vet list can be configured in the Scout Control Panel along with other key herd management criteria.



The "Herd Parameters" screen in Scout makes an easy place to set the criteria for managing a veterinary exam program, and key work lists.

While most of the technicians had some herds using Scout they are now better prepared to make suggestions on how to use it better, and where it can fit in a cow management program.