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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."

Cabhi 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

Every 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 practices has helped the Whites reach this lofty herd average.

"DHI testing (all milkings are weighed and sampled on test day) is the best 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 treatments. "Any time we intervene, we want to know whether or not that treatment improved that cow's health and whether or not it was a good return on investment."

White likes how DHI numbers help him objectively sort out cows that under produce and/or required intervention. "If we have to intervene (give treatment) too many 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-at-first-calving goal is 23 months of age," says White. "DHI lists help us hit that target. Without these lists, we'd probably miss some heifers and fall short of reaching this goal."

DHIA 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." White 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 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 partnership with crop consulting tools.

Besides capitalizing on DHI milk testing services, the Whites send soil and manure samples to Dairy One for evaluation. There are many factors, such as soil and manure, that influence a dairy operation's success – whether it's from an environmental, animal well-being or profitability perspective. "We rely on many test results to make a variety of decisions for the entire farming operation," says White.

Whether it's milk, soil or manure, White says that DHIA offer the best source of accurate records to help with management decision making. "My mind is usually in five different places. I'd be lost without the data provided by DHIA. It's the best information source, offering accurate and reliable data that help me focus and make objective, profit-oriented decisions."

Just like Cabhi Farm, the Hinckleys in Chatfield, Minn., use DHI records for so much more than just finding out how much milk, fat and protein their

cows produce. The milk samples play a key role in everything from monitoring milk quality to testing for Johne's disease.

Synchronized with DairyComp 305, an on-farm dairy management software program, Hinkleys' DHI testing starts with monthly supervised milk testing by a Minnesota DHIA field technician. "By reviewing milk production and quality records, I can compare herd mates with one another," says Adam Hinckley, who farms with his father, Dale. "I'm always working to improve the herd genetically. I wouldn't be able to do that without DHI records."

With DHI data working in harmony with dairy herd management software, Hinckley says it's fairly simple to create custom-made reports. His top go-to lists include bulk tank somatic cell count, cows to dry off, animals to vaccinate and cattle for herd health check.

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

In addition to health monitoring, DHI records help dairy producers analyze individual cow and herd profitability. For Hinckley, he asks, "Is that cow mak-

ing 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 DHI records with DairyComp 305 allows the Hinkleys to create herd management lists, such as animals to vaccinate. Generating lists helps with a variety of management activities, including pen moves, estrous 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. Hinkleys have 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 herd veterinarian to give the correct vaccination at the correct time.

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 so much more information available in that small vial, as the Hinkleys 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 Johne's-positive cow, Hinkleys make one of two choices: cull the cow or do not feed colostrum from her.

As with Johne's, Hinkleys record all herd health events – from breeding to



a case of mastitis – in DairyComp 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, Hinkleys says there's no way he can know 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 treatments through accurate records will prevent this from happening."

While Hinckley doesn't recall dairying without DHI 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 extremely high level," says Hinckley. "Despite herds getting larger, DHI tools and reports allow us to fine-tune treatment protocols on an individual basis."

Besides quality products, Hinckley says Minnesota DHIA provides quality training and implementation. "Employees are very helpful; I've always been very happy with their customer support. They've helped me a lot with developing protocols and scheduling tasks."

