

# Dairy Herd Health Program

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## **Introduction**

The definition of a successful dairy herd health program is difficult to state because of the wide variety of programs being offered to the dairy industry by the veterinary profession today. The type of programs offered by veterinarians today are structured to meet the client's needs and wishes; however, there should be some essential ingredients in every program offered in order to be successful over a period of time.

## **Program Content**

### *Goals and Objectives*

The plan should be well defined in its goals and objectives. An attempt should be made to evaluate the status of the herd prior to the initiation of a program. Some parameters which can be used are milk production, calving interval, services/conception, incidence of diseases, and culling rate as well as reasons for culling animals. This baseline evaluation is essential to the success of the program because the client must be able to see economic gain in order to justify the program. Any goal or objective reached in the program will be evaluated based upon previous performance. The status of the herd should be evaluated at specified intervals in order for the client to see progress and be able to justify continuing in the program. The health program should be tailor-made for each client. The goal of any program should be expansion to the complete control of the health of the herd by the veterinarian.

### *Written Agreement*

A written agreement should be made on any organized health program regardless of its magnitude. The agreement should contain objectives, responsibilities of both parties, inclusions and exclusions of the program, schedule of work, fees, and payment schedule. The agreement should be signed by both manager and veterinarian. It is not essential in most cases to structure a legally-binding document, but a written document answers any question of what is or is not included in the program.

### *Time Frame*

The program should be designed within a definitive time frame. Any written program should have a terminal date at which time it is re-evaluated and renewed for a specified interval. This definitive time frame allows for periodic evaluation and adjustment

of the program by mutual consent of both the client and the veterinarian. Economic adjustments are also made at this time.

### *Records*

Records are essential to the success of a program. These can be of any variety of forms and systems; however, an essential part of any system has to be the individual cow record. The information on the individual cow has to be completed and quickly accessible or the program breaks down.

### *Composition*

Composition of a complete dairy health program should include the following: fertility program; nutritional program; mastitis control; immunization program; consultation; and diagnostics. Reproduction and immunization are two basic components for the promotion of a long-term herd health program. Reproduction efficiency is easily measured through the results of program effort and highly visible to the client. The skills of the veterinarian cannot be easily duplicated by the client outside the veterinary profession. There are two reasons which make the reproduction aspect essential to the long-term success of health programs. Immunization programs ensure the well-being of the fertility program and so are also essential to successful health programs.

The areas of mastitis, nutrition, consultation, and diagnostics are very important ingredients of a total health program and in fact are essential to the delivery of a complete health package to a dairy client. However, these components do not fare well when they are asked to stand on their own merit without the support of the total health program.

### *Computer Program*

A complete health record is being recorded on a central computer for the Michigan State University campus dairy herd utilizing a CDC 6500 and a Texas silent 700 terminal with telephone hook-up. This program offers the advantages of central computer capacity and flexibility of terminal equipment which can be used by the veterinarian in an unlimited number of farms. It also prints all data out in longhand English which makes the record useful by the herdsman as well as the attending veterinarian. The readout consists of all events and findings since the last calving as well as retrieval capability of the

total record for each individual animal. A birth-to-death record can be kept on each animal in the herd as well as a current status record.

**The retrieval and summarization of data capability of this equipment should be practically unlimited. Some of the data which we will be attempting to retrieve will be such things as disease incidence, treatment evaluation, calving interval, service/conception, days open, milk production, inseminator success, as well as many other parameters and relationships.**

At the present time, we are developing the system and expect to expand to the private herds in Michigan in the near future. The program for retrieval of data is currently being worked on and we expect to have this capability in the near future.

### Summary

The future of the veterinarian in the dairy industry will depend on the profession's ability to adapt to the changing needs of the industry and the computer will play a central role in the record-keeping system essential to this industry. We as veterinarians must be prepared to meet this challenge or we will be replaced by others outside the profession who will attempt to supply the demands of the industry. The success or failure of a dairy health program depends on several factors which include good records as well as other ingredients stated in this paper. A veterinarian must have the client's confidence, an educated client, an economic need and adequate veterinary manpower and skills in order to have a viable health program. When all of these ingredients are present, the result is a satisfied dairy client and a good economic return for the time investment by the veterinarian.

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