

## Symposium on Economics of Therapy from Dairy Herd Owners' Viewpoint

### Panel Discussion

DR. BEN HARRINGTON, *Moderator*

DR. JAMES JARRETT, Georgia: I have often made the statement that every veterinarian should have a herd of cows of his own. The first thing we should remember from the dairyman is, "I want my veterinarian to make me money." In our country it costs about \$5.50 to \$5.75 a hundred to produce a hundred pounds of milk, and we are getting around \$6.50 to \$6.75 for milk now so everytime we pay out money, this cow has to make a lot of milk in return. I believe we have all been guilty of treating cows that we should have towed off and sold for beef and forgot about it! When I go in to check a cow (I think all of us should take this time) and find an acute case of disease I treat her immediately. However, for a lot of cows which are affected with a chronic disease perhaps the market is the best place! The state of lactation, of course, should be taken into consideration—how long she has been off feed, how quick she can be brought back, how much milk has she lost—we all know that if a dairyman has a cow off milk for long, then it is pretty hard to bring them back regardless.

With the chronic cases simply tell the farmer—milk the cow as long as she milks good, then sell her because here again you can clear some of those up, but if you do, you will have \$50, \$60, or \$70 in that cow, and at the price of milk today and the cost of milk production you are going to need a lot of milk to pay that back before she makes you any money.

Mastitis is another disease that we have a lot in our area, in our stabled cattle. I think we are very foolish to spend much time with cases that are of long standing. They do not respond too well to anything. If it is a purebred cow, a registered cow, why, of course, cases like this, we have to go along, but many times I have told a farmer that I wouldn't spend a nickel on this cow. Then the farmer will say, "That is the best cow I've got. She has a pedigree a mile long. Treat her, and I

will worry about the expense!" If this is the case, we are out to make a living—this is what we have to do! This is where we have developed a bad image—where we have gone out and dispensed a lot of medication, and given a song and dance! In chronic mastitis cases I think we should examine them very carefully, and if we think there's too much fibrous tissue and too many long-standing problems, then the best thing is slaughter. Of course, if you think you can treat them and bring them back to milk—fine! For ketosis cases we advise our herdsman if they repeat too many times the liver is damaged each time. So it may not be economical to retain recurrent cases.

In our area we have a lot of cows with broken legs, and I think we can make the farmer some money on some of these if it is a good reliable cow, by casting immediately and doing some work. I know it is hard work and runs into a lot of money, but if we can save a good cow (and we are paying around \$500 for grade cows in our area now and they are about 20 cents a pound for beef!). Of course, if you have a 1500 or 1600 pound Holstein cow and she could bring 22 or 23 cents, that's pretty good investment on a fresh cow ready to give milk. We do lots of surgery in our practice. If we operate on a cow and she gets well, she can get back on the milk line in another month or so and be back in pretty good production and make some money!

In our displaced abomasum cases we have found that the earlier the diagnosis, the quicker the surgery, the better the recovery. Many of them are back on feed the next day, with practically no appreciable loss in milk production. But of course, with some of the right side displacements we have had some real problems.

Teat surgery is a major item in our area. A lot of teats get stepped on, and of course, we make a lot of friends by doing teat surgery because we can make a cow increase her value from \$100 to \$200 apiece by doing teat surgery and ending up with a four-teater instead of a three-teater! But in disease prevention our vaccination programs, I think a lot of us have been dragging our feet on some of these vaccination procedures. I think there have been a lot of herdsman in our area who have been hoodwinked and robbed by various high pressure salesmanship on certain vaccination procedures. Preventative programs are expensive and the more I look at vaccination procedures and the various reports, the more confused I get. I think the cost of breeding is the biggest thing we have in our own herds, and I think in our practice the greatest things are herd-health programs. I still feel it is still much cheaper, as a farmer and a dairyman, to have a veterinarian to do my work than to have the local layman and the salesman come along and sell the stuff that I use.

**MODERATOR HARRINGTON:** Thank you, Dr. Jarrett.

**DR. MAURICE WELDY, Indiana:** My practice is primarily one where I work with a lot of large dairy herds, but we have to work primarily with averages and numbers. I spend quite a bit of time on udder health, reproductive health, and nutrition. I am reminded of the story

of a fellow who had the tomcat that prowled all of the time, and so he finally carried it down to the local veterinarian to have it castrated, to see if that would help any, and he brought the cat home four or five days later. Then a couple of weeks later he met a friend on the sidewalk, and the friend happened to ask him about his tomcat and the man said, "He is doing just fine. He's doing fine." The man said, "Oh?" He said, "Yeah, he's only going out one night a week instead of prowling every night and being out to all hours of the night, and come dragging in—he goes out one night a week and stays until about 12 o'clock, and comes back in." The friend said, "Oh, how's that?" "Well, he has become a consultant to the other tomcats in the block!"

I like to view management in individual operations, as related to various levels. We see the very nice purebred herds, such as the Paclamar Farms we saw the other day, and on the other end of the scales we see an operation like the one we have at home, where we use cheap cows, cheap labor, and just try to keep the banker happy! I think as practitioners it is a challenge to us to make recommendations that match the level of whatever management we are dealing with. We are foolish to advocate purebred cows to the man that can't keep his cows fed, but at the same time we are foolish to recommend cheap by-products to the man that is raising purebred cattle. I think this varies quite a bit in different sections of the country, so I think as practitioners it behooves us to be able to judge a given dairy farm and decide what level of management this farm may be operating on, and then key our recommendations to fit this rather than trying to change the whole operation.

The name of the game is to try to make money, and this is something that we have heard all day. We heard it at noon and we heard it several times again during this conference, and I think if we are going to make money for our clients, this is one thing that we need to keep in mind—the level of management we are dealing with, and try to key our recommendations to fit whatever level we may find on a given farm.

**MODERATOR HARRINGTON:** Dr. Jessup, do you want to add your comments to this?

**DR. VINCE JESSUP, California:** I like to think of myself as a dairyman who happens to be a veterinarian, not the other way around. I agree with Jim—I am in the dairy business to make a profit, and this is what we are pushing. The best operation we had last year—with five different herds—and the best one we had made \$17,800 on milk. With some of the others, they weren't quite that good, but we had them all pushing up there, and the hardest thing to find, to sell, is management, and that is what it is all about. I like to push a man as far as I think he can go, and if he isn't going far enough to suit me, then we will replace him, and so far we have replaced two last year.

I wrote down some things here that I think you can get a client to do to make him a lot of money that is not involved exactly in veterinary medicine, but it is just plain common sense. Number one is

cow comfort. That is the easiest, quickest thing, the cheapest thing he can get. The best thing to go for first is bedding, and whether you are going to bed them in the corral—in Southern California where we use a lot of sawdust and shavings, and a lot of fellows don't believe in that. They go for mud! I think they are missing a real bet. Some of the best dairymen I know down there, at least in years gone by, could trade a load of heifer dust for a load of sawdust and shavings, and pay a little more loot on the side, and these guys always did better than anyone else!

So, I am pushing this—that we get all the sawdust and shavings that we can get our hands on—and we are going for separators to get the fiber back out of the manure. They cost \$4500. But you can get all that manure back for about five horsepower of electricity, so with \$4500, you get it back in about six months. I think that is a pretty good investment. Standard Oil figures one year, and this has got their standard beat, so if it is good enough for them it is good enough for me. Then we go for cotton hulls. That makes real good bedding. This packs down tight, and you need to make it at least three-foot deep because you want it to act as a mechanical barrier between the cow's foot and the ground. When the moisture comes it is going to percolate on through, but you don't get a real mess stirred up by the cow tramping it up. Let the water percolate through, go on down to the soil, and you are all right. It doesn't matter if it is out in the rain, as long as it is deep enough.

We try to put in some loafing stalls, and I think they have helped us a lot. In one herd I don't think they helped there because the management was not up to making sure that they worked right. He did not work at maintaining them. The other man did, so they were satisfactory in one barn and not in the other. So it depends on what a man might like and what he will make work.

I think that in the East you have a different problem than we have in the West so I will confine my remarks to the West because I know more about it! As far as feed is concerned, we have all alfalfa. We don't make much silage. We think silage is great for the grower and not for dairymen, but then that is a matter of opinion! We happen to have alfalfa hay, so it is cheaper for us to feed hay than silage because I think you are in the material handling business, and if you think I am kidding, start adding them up—manure, hay silage, milk, cattle, and you've got a lot of things to move, on and off the truck, or in and out of the tank, or onto a tanker, and so you have a lot of calluses on your hands, and I don't know any dairymen with calluses on their hands! So I think that is something to consider. The time, or timing, of what you see is real important, and the guy that stays in bed until 7:30 is not going to be in the dairy business very long! The most successful men I know are fellows who are out feeding their cattle at 5 o'clock in the morning, and those cattle don't know what it is to miss a meal or to have to wait two hours to get fed. Now that is if you are on a hay program. Silage—the same way! At home they are starting to combine

roughage and concentrate and give them a combined feed all the time. This is important. I know of one large installation that had a split herd. They had one herd that averaged 3.7% butterfat, and the other one averaged 3.4. They were going crazy because they could not find out why one of them was higher than the other—the same milkers, the same milking machines, the same management, everything, but half of their herd only had 3.4% test—but they found out one-half the herd was being fed grain twice a day on the outside, and the other half of the herd was being fed grain only once a day, so he had a difference in fiber content at one time during the day. It made quite a difference, so to the once-a-day grain feeders I suggest looking into a different time schedule. I know dairymen at home that are feeding their dry cows 20 pounds of grain a day and they have about an 18,000 pound milk average, and we really try to take care of our dry cows. We push them—after we get them dry—we push the socks off of them! We try to get them up so that about the time they become fresh, they are really rolling!

I have a very strong opinion about what constitutes a good milking machine and to me there is only one on the market. I think the others are jokes! I don't care if someone wants to argue the point; that is the way I feel. I put my money where my mouth is! I spent about \$27,000 putting in an installation not too long ago, so at least I believe in what I say. I have seen others which I think are mastitis manufacturers, and I have been at many a dairy where I changed their milking installations! I know one in particular that had 42 pounds of milk a day average, and a year later, they made some pretty good changes in installation and management, and they got up to 60 pounds of milk a day. So that is not doing too badly, and I think they can manage to pay off the expense on their milking machines. When it comes to culling, I think the dairymen in Southern California really do it right. They put their heart in their pocket when they walk out into the barn! They don't know one cow from another as far as friendship is concerned. They just do not have a friend in that barn, except a profitable one. A guy I know gets these DHA sheets at 11 o'clock in the morning, and by 1:00 the beef truck is there, and they are gone! I think that he just does a real good job. He is in partnership with another man, and they are doing well. Their only problem is income tax!

We have a treatment program which we start the day after the cow is fresh. You have 60 days while you are waiting for the cow to breed, so why not use the 60 days to get the cow in shape to conceive and not wait for the cow to be bred, and then find out that she has pyometra. I have seen two pyometra cases in three years! We keep accurate breeding records. If a cow is not in heat right away, we are looking at her in 30 days after she is fresh, not 30 days after she has been fresh 60 days! If a cow starts to have her irregular heat period, we look for cases of nymphomania. So far, I feel pretty good. We get them before they become a problem. They are a slight problem when we go to work on them and not a real problem later.

We have a good vaccination program. We start with blackleg and brucellosis, even though it is now voluntary in many states. I think I'd go out of the dairy business first before I'd give up brucellosis vaccination. We also use polyvalent lepto vaccines. I think that lepto spirosis is the number one bovine disease in the United States, and I think it gives us the bigger problems in conception. We vaccinate our fresh cows for IBR, BVD, and PI<sub>3</sub> and also lepto, and we give them A, D, and E twice: when they go dry, and when they come fresh. We are pushing our cows on a strict preventative program all the way. I do not like clinical problems; I am a lousy diagnostician, so I push the prevention program! We keep good records. We try to push our mastitis control by controlling our milking machines and analyzing all the time. Sixty-six percent of our herd at Tacoma was third calf and older, and yet we had 92% CMT negatives and traces, so Frank Smith used to come out and analyze that milking machine. He always said it worked better than any that he had before, and I felt proud about it, and also lucky! It wasn't any real design; there is just a lot of luck that goes into this thing. Not all of these things work exactly like their engineers work, and so there's just a lot of luck. The conception rate is important. Now I have it down to about 1.52. Frozen semens help, and so, for the 1.5 services per cow record, and that is every cow, even the one that had 10 services that we culled last month! Her record is still in the herd for 12 months after she leaves. This is the way I calculate them. I do this because we can do it ourselves immediately. I take the month, I run that down the first column, then total services, every month. If this cow comes in heat twice that month and is bred, I keep that count, both services, and I keep a column for first services—just for interest. I keep track of the milking cows every day, dry cows every day, the cows that I beefed off that month and the deaths. I total them and then I total for the twelve months so that I keep a running average, services per cow, and it will vary from about 1.52 to about 1.54 services per cow, depending on the time of year. But the best thing about it is that the dairyman keeps the records, and it takes him about three minutes to figure this out with an adding machine. If a cow is culled as a hard breeder, her record still stays behind her for 12 months, and it still affects these herd averages, and this is the thing that I think is important—that the dairyman develop all of these records himself, and he does it in about five minutes or so, and he believes them because he kept them, and this is important!

I know two dairymen in Southern California who cull at 50 pounds of milk a day. That's the bottom. When a cow gets down to 50 pounds of milk a day, she is walking onto a beef truck! All it boils down to is, what is the dairyman satisfied with? I might say there is one advantage in Southern California. They are all dairymen. They are in the barn six or eight hours a day; they are in the corrals two or three hours a day. They are pushing a pencil on their weight sheets or breeding records, or something, two or three hours a day, and they know every cow intimately. They don't horse around! They don't hope

she will do better; they don't think she will do better. They don't suppose she will do better. She will do better or she is gone! That is all there is to it. The profit motive.

**MODERATOR HARRINGTON:** John, what do you figure in your area? What does the average dairyman spend on herd health?

**DR. JOHN WOODS, Arizona:** I feel my responsibility to the dairyman is to give him as much aid as within the terms he needs this aid, what kind of aid needed, in what form he needs it, as cheap as possible, and to utilize him and his labor as much as possible, consistent with getting a good job done. If you don't give it to him, then stay away from him because he does not care whether there is a veterinarian on the place or not.

