

Dairy Health Management

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Since I am specializing in dairy practice, my wife gave me an article the other night which said "a specialist is a man who learns more and more about less and less until he finds out everything there is to know about nothing!" As some of you probably know, my practice extends over quite an area in the Southeast and I have active clients from Arkansas to the Carolinas and from Tennessee to Florida. This entails a lot of travel. My profession is related entirely to dairy practice. I work with large herds across the Southeast and I feel like the Southeast is one of the up and coming livestock areas of the United States. I hope to be part of our improved livestock industry in this area. I think that probably there is not anybody in this room that could not help a large dairy farmer or a large beef cattle farmer or any large livestock operation (or small farmer for that matter either). I think it becomes a matter of being able to apply the scientific knowledge or that we have not done what we know should be done, so I find personal evaluation and human motivation become a great part of my practice—not knowing what to do but how to get it done, and maybe 10% or 15% of the time we can get done what we would like to get done. I would like to get in on as much of the business end of my clients as I can. I think that not only is veterinary medicine and health management a part of it but we need to know a lot of his total business management in terms of cash flow, etc. Dairy men in our area, as a group, are one of the worst to overcapitalize I think I ever saw. It seems they always have to have that new silo and that new tractor. None of the items that they just think they have to have to increase the cash flow, and it takes cash flow to pay debts. We are in the dairy business at home. We milk about 700 head and we know there is a lot of money in the dairy business. I have not had much out, but I know there is a lot in there. I find that personal management or human motivation seems to be a great part of my practice.

In dealing with strictly veterinary medicine topics, I try to concentrate on three primary areas: that of udder health management and in this area watching the barometers of CMT readings, milk production and active mastitis cases. In order to control these problems check the sanitation and apply some treatment, but hopefully we keep it down to a minimum. We check especially the design, installation and use of the mechanical milking system. Reproductive health is also an important area and here I think one of the most important areas is the management of the dry cow and the newly calved cow and how we get them treated, hopefully to minimize her stress as much as possible. Another area that is important is nutrition. I depend strongly on computer work-up of least-cost rations in this area. I think most of us know what to do but it becomes a matter of evaluating available personnel and getting done what we want to get done. I would like to talk about something that I call balanced management for want of a better term. By this I mean that if we go to one individual's farm for instance, say he is milking 25 cows a day and has worn out equipment and poor help, we would be making a bad choice to advise this man to start milking registered cattle. On the other hand, we would also be making a bad choice in advising the registered cattle man to switch if he is making money on the sale of replacement stock. He can afford the expensive silo, the expensive tractors and the higher operating cost because he has a higher cash flow, so I think it becomes a challenge for us practitioners to evaluate a given farm situation and try to fit our recommendations to the needs of a given management situation of a given group of people in order to help our clients. Always keep in mind that anything we do, anything we charge for, must ultimately increase this man's net profit because if we can do this, I believe we are serving what we call our needs.