Volume 9, Issue 1, Winter 2000

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

DAIRY Initiatives

NEWSLETTER

Contents

SEE INSERT FOR CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Hire the Right Person

Before you go looking for help, it helps to decide what you really need

CHUCK SCHWARTAU
University of Minnesota Extension Service, Goodhue County

Are you having trouble keeping good help?

America's 1.3 million hired farm workers earn an average of $7.83 per hour. Given those statistics, are you asking yourself, "Why can't I keep two or three employees for any length of time when I'm paying $10.00 per hour?"

One of the main reasons people leave a job is because they aren't the right person for the job. Selecting the right employee in the first place is probably one of the most important things you can do to keep satisfied employees on your farm.

Four Steps to Successful Hiring

The process of selecting the right employee starts long before the interviews—even before you put the ad in the paper. It really starts with an analysis of your farm's labor needs. The following four-step process will help ensure you hire the right person for the right job.

1. Make a detailed list of all of the the tasks to be done on your farm, how long it takes to do each task, how often they are done (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly), and who does them. Don't forget to include management tasks—bookkeeping, supply purchasing, visits with consultants and lenders, and so on.
2. Multiply the time per task by the number of times the task needs doing to determine how many hours of labor are needed on the farm per week and per year.
3. List the current workforce on the farm, including you, your spouse, your children, and anyone else who contributes time to the farm. List how much time each of these people has available (per day, week, month, or year), how much time their jobs take, and when they are to be done. If possible, put all this information onto a grid similar to the cash flow sheets you prepare for your lender.
4. Look over the information you've put together. Who is trying to put in too much time? Which of their tasks could be assigned to another person on the farm? You might learn, for example, that management time is being shorted because the principal operator is doing a lot of milking, feeding, or other relatively routine tasks that could and should be taken on by someone else. After you've filled out your existing workers' schedules, what's left tells you how much and what

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Hire the Right Person

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type of hired labor you really need.

This kind of analysis is helpful because it lets you assign people to the tasks best suited to their skills and abilities. It also makes clear to both you and prospective employees the quantity and type of help you need. By communicating an accurate job description, you increase the chance of hiring the right person for the job.

Consider Timing, Too

When defining your need for help, consider not only what kind of help you need, but when and how often you need it.

Farm work falls into several categories:

- **ROUTINE JOBS (milking, feeding, scraping manure, breeding, etc.). These take about the same amount of time every day.**
- **JOBS THAT TAKE EXTRA TIME ON A PERIODIC BASIS—regularly scheduled veterinary visits for pregnancy checks, time with the nutritionist or the farm management advisor.**
- **OCCASIONAL JOBS. These are jobs that come up less regularly—things like moving heifers from barn to barn or farm to farm, helping the hoof trimmer, or replacing stall dividers and mats.**
- **SEASONAL JOBS such as crop production and harvest. These jobs might require extra help for four or five months.**

Why is this important? Say you get bogged down helping the hoof trimmer one day and make a quick decision to hire help. If you don't think about timing, you might end up with a full-time person when what you really needed was a list of people willing to provide occasional help on a day-to-day basis.

Full time, part time, seasonal, temporary—if you carefully consider both your circumstances and your options, you will be more likely to have the amount of help you need, when you need it.

Editor's note: This type of job analysis exercise is one of the elements of the "Employment Skills for Today" course the University of Minnesota Extension Service has been teaching around Minnesota during the past year. For more information about the course and its contents, contact Chuck Schwartau in Goodhue County at 651/385-3100 or 800/385-3101, Lee Gross in Stearns County at 320/255-6169, or Patrick Kearney in Kandiyohi County at 320/231-7890.

Chill Out With Supplemental Cooling

Summer's no bummer if you keep your cows cool

KEVIN A. JANNI
Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, University of Minnesota

Do you have trouble with decreased production and breeding problems in the summer? Maybe you should be thinking about installing supplemental cooling now. Many dairy producers find that supplemental cooling can help cows maintain milk production and breeding efficiency during hot weather.

You can provide supplemental cooling:

- In holding pens
- Alongside feed mangers or fences
- In close-up (dry) cow pens
- Over freestalls
- In maternity and sick/treatment pens

Supplemental cooling cannot fix problems caused by inadequate or improper ventilation. Make sure that the area is properly ventilated and shaded before spending money on supplemental cooling.

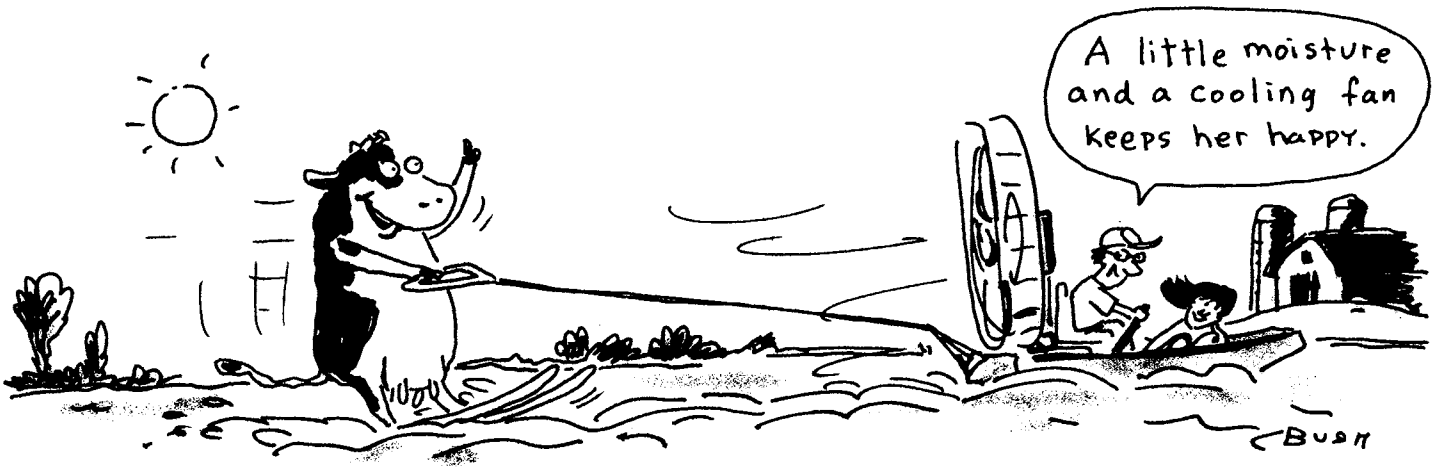
Supplemental cooling can be provided using:

- Cooling or mixing fans
- Fans and sprinklers
- Fans and misters

Sprinklers and misters are not interchangeable. Their design and mode of action are very different. Sprinklers soak cows to the skin, so their body heat is used to evaporate the water. Misters create a very fine mist, which evaporates in the air and cools the air. Improperly designed systems may not provide the needed cooling effect. They may also create wet conditions that lead to increased mastitis.

Cooling Fans

In all cases the first step is to add mixing fans to create a draft across or past the cows, which helps remove body heat. Direct-drive axial-flow fans are preferred, primarily because they retain their performance over time better than belt-driven fans. Most mixing fans are 36 or 48 inches in diameter and normally installed about 10 to 12 feet above the cow feeding alley, or high enough to clear equipment operating below the fans. Fans over freestalls are usually mounted 8 feet above the cow alley or higher if necessary to keep cows from reaching the fans. The fans are angled downward 15 to 20 degrees. The goal is to create air velocities around 200 to 300 feet per minute across the



John Bush ©2000

cows' backs. The recommended distance between fans is 30 feet for 3-foot diameter fans and 40 feet for 4-foot diameter fans. All fans should be blowing air in the same direction. Most cooling fans in naturally ventilated barns are mounted to blow air toward the east or north. Mixing fans are usually controlled with thermostats that turn the fans on at 70° F and above.

In holding areas where clearance is limited, fans can be mounted along the side of the holding pen with the airflow directed across the animals. Again, all fans should blow air in the same direction. Don't blow air toward the milking parlor. Mount the fans securely and provide guards and screens to prevent cows from reaching moving parts and electrical wiring.

Fans and Sprinklers

Low-pressure sprinklers and fans can be used along feed bunks and in holding areas where there is good ventilation (air exchange) and it doesn't matter if the floor gets wet. The fans run continuously while the sprinklers turn on and off. The sprinklers are on long enough to wet the cows' hair and coat to the skin—typically 1 to 3 minutes every 10 to 15 minutes. Excess sprinkling wastes water and does not reduce heat stress. The cows feel cooler because some of their body heat is used to evaporate the water. It is critical that the sprinklers be turned off for evaporation to occur. Adequate air exchange is essential to remove the humidified air.

Install sprinklers so they will not wet feed in the feed bunk or bedding in the freestalls. (Wet bedding can lead to an increase in mastitis.) Use either 180-degree (half-circle) or 360-degree (full-circle), low pressure (20 to 25 psi) sprinkler nozzles that produce a shower of large droplets that readily wets the cows' skin, not a fine mist. Irrigation nozzles and solid-cone coarse droplet spray nozzles with flow rates between 0.2 and 0.5 gallons per minute work very well. Along a feed manger, 180-degree nozzles mounted next to the bunk so they spray away from the bunk minimize feed wetting. The 360-degree nozzles work well in holding areas.

Use sprinkler supplier information to determine nozzle spacing based on water pressure. Space nozzles so that the system provides a uniform distribution. Size water lines adequately to provide sufficient water flow and minimal pressure drop to produce a more uniform spray, especially along long feed bunks. Consider installing a pressure regulator to keep the water pressure within operating limits. Excessive pressure may produce a mist or smaller droplets that do not wet the cows' hair to the skin.

Sprinkler systems can be automatically controlled using a thermostat and 30-minute cycle timer in series. Sprinkler systems are usually set to turn on when air temperatures exceed 78° to 80° F.

Fans and Misters

High-pressure misters (sometimes called foggers) operate at pressures around 200 psi. They create very fine droplets that evaporate in the air, reducing the air temperature a few degrees. Fans then blow the cooler air past the cows. The amount of cooling achieved depends on air temperature, relative humidity, and the amount of water mist evaporated. Misting systems work best in dry climates. Adequate ventilation (air exchange) is required to remove the humidified and heated air.

Misting systems run continuously when cooling is needed. Some can be mounted directly on cooling fans. Booster pumps are required to provide the water pressure needed to create the fine droplets. A properly designed, installed, and maintained misting system can cool air without wetting cows or their surroundings, so they can be used where sprinklers cannot. Be sure to keep them working right, however. Improperly operating units can quickly wet a considerable area.

Misting systems suffer from nozzle plugging. Water filters reduce plugging, but add to the maintenance required. Use piping and connectors that can handle the water pressure required by the nozzles. Size pipes to provide adequate water flow and minimal pressure drop.

Misting systems can be automatically controlled using a thermostat. Misters are usually set to turn on when air temperatures exceed 78° to 80° F.

Risk Management: The First Steps

MARGOT RUDSTROM
West Central Research and Outreach Center, University of Minnesota

Before you choose risk management tools, it's important to identify the risks you need to manage.

Risk management tools such as crop insurance, life insurance, futures and options, and contracts can help you manage the risks in dairy farming. But before you choose risk management tools, it's important to identify the risks you need to manage. Many times identifying the key risks is the first step in reducing the risk. Understanding the risks lets you choose the best tools for the job.

First, some definitions:

EVENT—An event is something that happens. It can be external to the operation (something you don't control, such as a weather event) or internal (something you control, such as a decision you make regarding herd health). The key is to think about events that could affect the ability of your business to operate. Events can range from a drop in milk price, to divorce, to hiring new employees, to bringing a son or daughter into the farm business, to hailstorms—and the list goes on.

OUTCOME—What could happen if an event occurs? An event can have more than one outcome. The key to successful risk management is identifying all potential outcomes, both positive and negative.

An example of an event and outcomes: You treat a cow for mastitis (event). Two possible outcomes are:

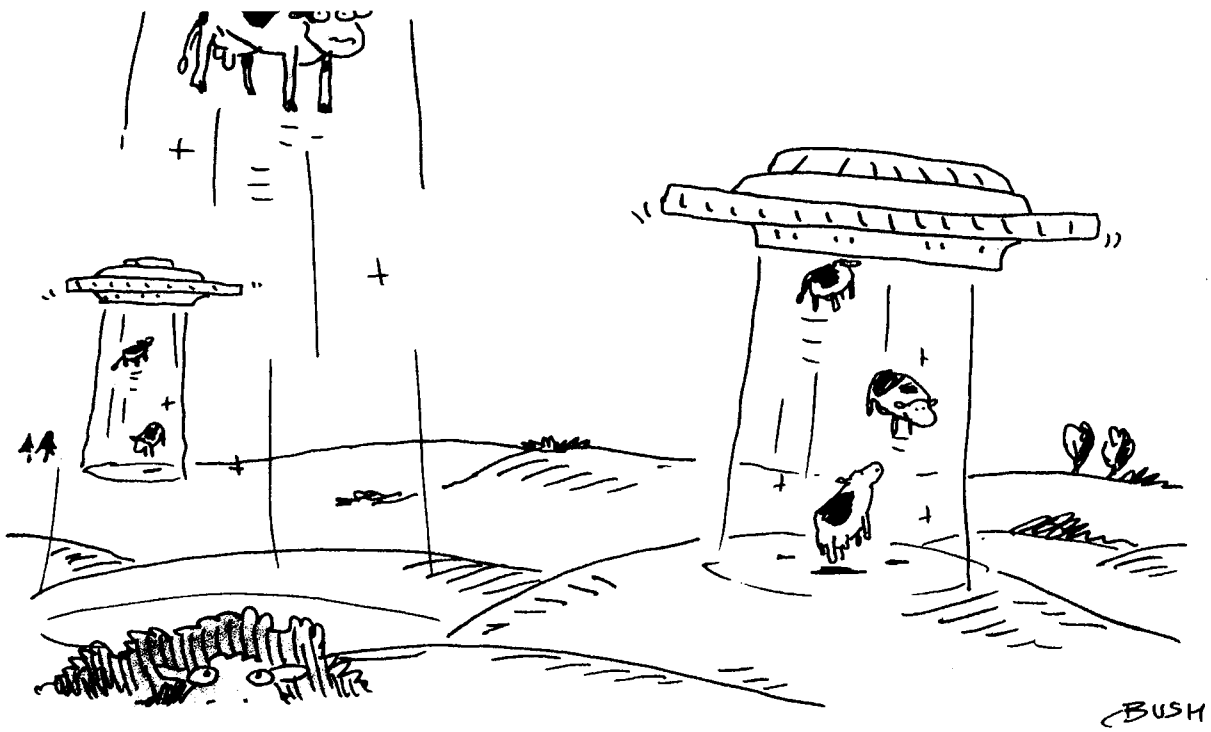
1. Milk from the treated cow is dumped.
2. Milk from the treated cow is not dumped and ends up in the tank.

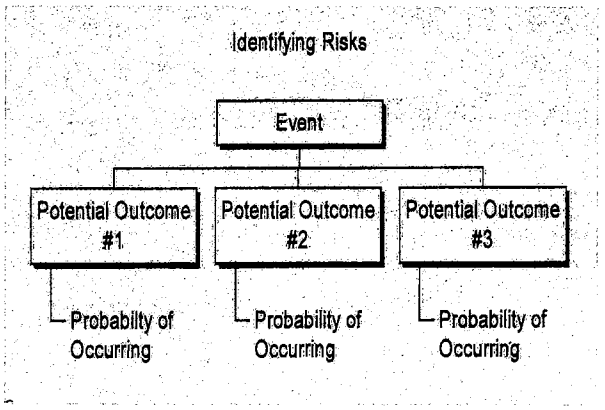
PROBABILITY—Because an event can have more than one outcome, we need to rank how likely each outcome is. Probabilities are most often used for this. In the above example, the likelihood of dumping the milk from a treated cow could be 95%. That means there would be a 5% chance that milk containing antibiotics would show up in your tank.

What Is Risk?

Risk occurs when an event has more than one potential outcome, you don't know for sure which outcome will happen, and one of those outcomes could be costly to your business. If you have not identified the alternative outcomes, risk increases.

The following diagram shows how to map out risk. Mapping out your risks gives you a clearer picture of the tools you might use to manage risk.





Identifying and Prioritizing Risks

Identifying and prioritizing risks is a three-step process.

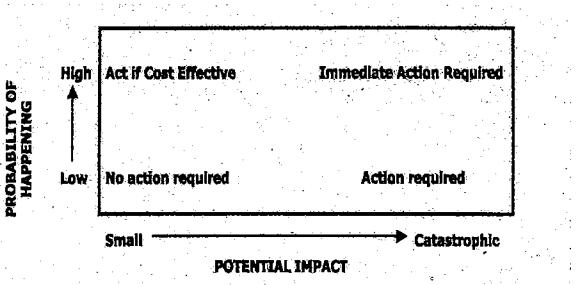
STEP 1: Identify all potential outcomes of an event.

STEP 2: Assign a probability for each potential outcome.

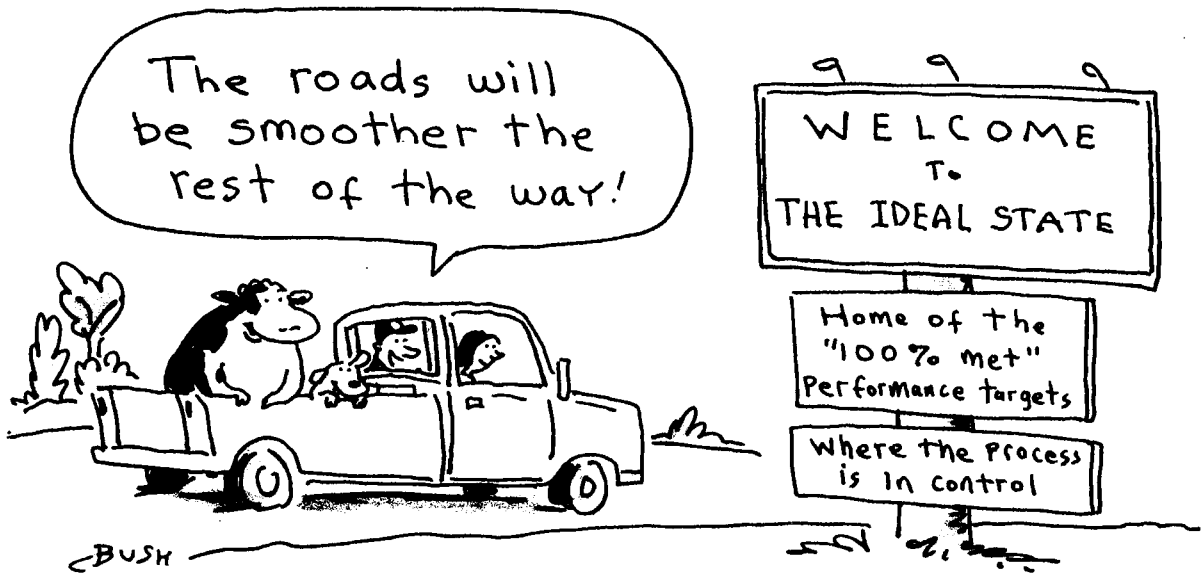
STEP 3: Prioritize the risks of negative outcomes. Start by determining which outcomes would cause your farm to cease operating. For other negative outcomes, determine the cost.

After you have identified and prioritized risks, you can begin to identify which risks need attention, how you might protect your farm business against potential negative outcomes, and who can help you manage your risks (veterinarian, nutritionist, financial planner, tax consultant, lawyer, etc.).

The following table, developed by Geoff Benson of North Carolina State University, can help you determine which risks need immediate attention. If an outcome has a high probability of happening and the potential impact on your business would be catastrophic, it requires immediate attention. You need to have a plan in place for when this outcome occurs. If an outcome has a low probability of occurring and would have a small impact on your business, no action is required.



Once you have identified the risks needing immediate attention, those not so urgent, and the risks that don't have the potential to disrupt your business, you are in the position to identify the resources and tools you will need to manage risk on your farm.



Keep Moving Ahead

JEFFREY K. RENEAU
Department of Animal Science, University of Minnesota

Where am I going? Backsliding? Staying even? Or moving ahead?

These nagging questions apply not only to our personal lives, but also to the dairy business. Too often it seems like we progress "two steps forward, one step back." If only we could find a way to make consistent, continuous progress toward our goals.

Over the past 50 years a man named W. Edwards Deming revolutionized thinking on how manufacturing businesses can make continuous progress by changing management attitudes and focusing on continuous improvement of processes. Can Deming's principles help dairies? We believe they can.

To apply Deming's principles to your operation, start by thinking of the dairy as a series of processes working together to produce a product. Each process involves a series of tasks, each of which affects the outcome. For example, each task in the milking process can affect the quantity and quality of milk produced.

Next, set an attainable goal (Deming calls it a "performance target") and develop a plan of action to improve the process(es) involved until the goal is reached.

Once you reach the goal, keep monitoring the process to make sure it is stable and predictable. If you decide further improvement is needed, reset the goal, redesign the process, and make adjustments until the new goal is reached and the process is once again stable.

Deming points out that all processes fall into one of four states:

The Ideal State

- The process is in control
- The performance target is being met 100%

The Threshold State

- The process is in control
- The performance target is not met 100% of the time

The Brink of Chaos

- The process is out of control
- The performance target is being met 100%

The State of Chaos

- The process is out of control
- The performance target is not being met

It probably would be impossible to find a livestock operation with all of its processes in the "ideal state." However, the best farms will have proportionately more processes in the "ideal state" and fewer in the "state of chaos" than poorly managed farms. The goal is to move each process toward the "ideal state."

MINNESOTA DAIRY LEADERS UPDATE

In 1992, dairy farmers, and CEOs of 32 dairy related businesses and organizations made a formal commitment to revitalize Minnesota's dairy industry by forming a structure to unite their effort. That structure is the Dairy Leaders Roundtable. This newsletter highlights Roundtable accomplishments as well as on-going projects and plans.

Website is linking Minnesota dairy producers

Minnesota dairy producers can network with the dairy industry without leaving the farm.

The new MinnLink Internet website is specially designed to provide links to common sites used by dairy producers and industry providers.

Found at www.MinnLink.org, the site categorizes state dairy information to ease accessibility.

Though the site provides a cross-section of information, it focuses on dairy farm management, Dan Little said. He added, "It gives dairy producers an efficient way to gather and interpret information about their business."

Little, a consulting veterinarian from Agri-Vet Services LLC in Rochester, Minn., coordinates the site which is patterned after Wisconsin's WisLink.

"Wisconsin established an infrastructure for a dairy website and Minnesota is building on that pattern," Little said.

Site features

The site enables more than one person to place information on the Web pages. "If you have permission to upload information to the website, you can do so with the Web design software of your choice," Little said.

And though there are numerous Web page designers and links, Little said the website is fully searchable.

For example, if a user searches for "Johne's disease," the website's search engine will scan all the site's links for that phrase.

However, Little expects the most popular attraction to be the Producer Tips Folder. Dairy producers can submit management tips to be posted on the website. Created by the Midwest Dairy Association, Central Minnesota Dairy Profit Teams and the Minnesota Dairy Leaders Roundtable, the website is growing as awareness increases.

For more information on the site, visit www.MinnLink.org. For permission to post information on the site or to link another site, e-mail support@MinnLink.org or call 1 (800) 937-8387.

Roundtable supports resolution

Roundtable members passed a resolution supporting a delay in implementation of feedlot regulations until after completion of the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) study.

Minnesota's Environmental Quality Board is conducting the GEIS, examining the state's animal agriculture industry. A preliminary report is expected to be completed this year.

Dairy economist: Midwest producers can compete in dairy marketplace

A Northeast dairy economist says Midwest producers have a comparative advantage.

"If Midwest dairy producers build on the infrastructure they have, this will continue to be a profitable place to dairy" said Ken Bailey, dairy policy specialist at Pennsylvania State University.

Bailey spoke to participants in the Minnesota Dairy Leaders Roundtable meeting held Dec. 6 in St. Paul, Minn.

Bailey said Midwest advantages, include:

Ken Bailey, dairy policy specialist at Pennsylvania State University, addressed members of the Minnesota Dairy Leaders Roundtable on the topic of "The Future of the Dairy Industry—Milk Marketing and Pricing."

▪ Climate

"Cows like producing milk in the north country. Cows are cool-weather animals." said Bailey who holds a doctorate in agricultural economics from the University of Minnesota.

▪ Forage & feed supplies

Midwest dairy producers are doing business in top-producing forage and grain states. Midwest producers generally have a high-quality, low-cost feed supply, he said.

▪ Milk concentration

The volume of milk produced per square mile is higher in the Midwest than most parts of the country. That concentration supports an infrastructure of manufacturing plants which process 85 percent of the milk into dairy products.

▪ Strategic location

Located in the center of the country, Bailey said Midwest dairy processors are strategically located to supply the nation with dairy products.

▪ People.

"Midwest producers are innovative and willing to expand," Bailey said, adding that mindset will keep them competitive with other parts of the country.

Farmers in the Midwest who oppose large operations should realize big farms help keep local processing plants, veterinarians and other businesses open.

"We need a culture that says it's ok to grow," he added.

To maintain a competitive edge, Bailey said Midwest producers need to "get more business oriented."

Farmers need to consider such moves as accrual-based accounting. You need to know every penny going in and out of that business.

To visit Bailey's Penn State Dairy Outlook Web Page, go to www.aers.psu.edu/dairyoutlook/

BAILEY'S STRATEGY FOR SUCCESSFUL PRODUCERS

1) Be a low cost supplier.

2) Know unit cost of production.

3) High production per cow.

4) Lock in gross milk margin.

5) Develop a monthly cash flow budget.

6) Lock in prices—milk and feed—at times.

7) Be innovative.

8) Strive for a "fair" marketing environment.

Legislative agenda begins

The Minnesota Dairy Leaders Roundtable 2000 legislative agenda is being set.

Lori Weaver, director of dairy policy for the Minnesota Association of Cooperatives, surveyed Roundtable members regarding the agenda.

Roundtable Steering Committee Member Paul Kent, a dairy producer from Mora, Minn., discussed the issues slated for consideration at the Dec. 6 MDLR meeting. The following are being considered:

- One-stop shop for permitting and/or feedlot compliance.
- Expansion of funding for Johne's disease programs.
- Support for continued or increased funding for Pseudorabies programs.
- Support for a veterinary diagnostic laboratory.
- Support for farmer networking, allowing dairy producers to choose the business structure under which they want to operate.
- Support for dairy diagnostic teams with new funding for early planning grants.
- Support for delay of implementation of livestock rules until the GEIS is completed.

Members of the Roundtable Legislative Coalition will meet in early February to finalize the agenda.

The main driver of the upcoming session, set to begin Feb. 1, will be the bonding bill. Weaver said a bonding bill contains funding for long-term capital projects such as buildings.

The last bonding bill in 1998 totaled $999 million, with this year's projected to be $400 million.

Weaver said a farm relief package is already being discussed. In '99, the legislature gave farmers $70 million in the form of a per-acre rebate.

"We could have a program similar to last year's rebate, but this will depend upon budget surplus figures," Weaver said.

Dairy producers wanting to comment on the legislative agenda should contact Weaver, at: phone: (608) 258-4414, fax (608) 258-4407, or e-mail LKWEAVER@aol.com.

TRAINING PARTNERSHIP LINKS RESOURCES WITH ON-THE-FARM NEEDS

Dairy educators are taking their skills to the country.

The state's Minnesota Job Skills Partnership is linking dairy educators with producers needing additional expertise.

Started in 1998, the classes are offered throughout the state on such subject areas as milker training, financial management, dairy nutrition and labor management.

The most popular class is milker training, said Lee Gross, a University of Minnesota extension educator for Stearns County.

"Growing participation in these classes is due to the changing dynamic of dairy farms," Gross said.

"As dairies get larger, more employees are involved in decision making," he said. "Dairy owners and managers are searching for a way to get more education for their employees and information resources for themselves."

Classes through the state's Job Skills Partnership are posted at www.MinnLink.org and in the Dairy Initiatives Newsletter.

For more information on upcoming Minnesota Job Skills Partnership classes, contact Bonnie Rae at the University of Minnesota Animal Science Department, telephone, (612) 624-4995, fax: (612) 625-1283.

DAIRY FARM TOUR GUIDE AVAILABLE

Are you remodeling your dairy barn? Thinking about building a new parlor?

Fellow dairy producers are opening their doors to producers interested in exploring new ideas on Minnesota dairy farms. The Minnesota Dairy Farm Tour Guide is available to all Minnesota producers.

Categorized according to location, facilities, manure systems and feed programs, the guide has been compiled by the Minnesota Dairy Leaders Roundtable.

Dairy Farm Tour Guide, please contact: Minnesota Dairy Farm Tour Guide,1778 Eustis Street, Lauderdale, MN 55113, Telephone: 651-645-3275, Fax: 651-917-9637, Email: dweinand@yahoo.com

Questions?

If you have questions about regulations, permits or other dairy development issues you can get advice toll-free from an Agricultural Development Specialist, Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Call 1-800-967-AGRI (2474)

Calendar of Events

Educational opportunities open to all producers and other professionals in the dairy industry

MARCH

3	West Central Holstein Assn. Convention Sale, Arrowwood Inn, Alexandria, MN. Contact: Pauline Bratt 320-259-0637
3 & 4	MN Holstein Association Convention, Arrowwood Inn, Alexandria, MN. Contact: Pauline Bratt 320-259-0637
7 & 14	Dairy Nutrition School for Feeders, City Hall, Cannon Falls, MN. Contact: Neil Broadwater 507-457-6440 or Chuck Schwartau 651-385-3100
7 & 14	Transition Cow Workshop (2-day workshop), Norwood, Minnesota. Contact: Vern Oraskovich 612-442-4496
8 & 15	Basic Dairy Nutrition (2-day workshop), Waseca, MN. Contact: Hugh Chester-Jones 507-835-3620
9	MN Livestock Breeders Annual Meeting & Livestock Hall of Fame Induction, Earle Brown Center, U of MN, St. Paul Campus. Contact: Steve Pooch 651-642-2217
9	Livestock Odor Workshop II: Technical Training on Odor Intensity, Rating System & Odor Control, Holiday Inn South, Rochester, MN. Contact: Kevin Janni 612-625-3108 or Judy Weicherding 612-625-4217
9	Dairy Reproduction, Fergus Falls, MN. Contact: Veterinary Outreach Programs 800-380-8636 or 612-624-3434
9 & 16	Transition Cow Workshop (2-day workshop), Stearns County, MN. Contact: Jim Salfer 320-255-6169
14	Livestock Odor Workshop II: Technical Training on Odor Intensity, Rating System & Odor Control, Park Inn & Suites, Shakopee, MN. Contact: Kevin Janni 612-625-3108 or Judy Weicherding 612-625-4217
14	Dairy Reproduction, Rochester, MN. Contact: Veterinary Outreach Programs, 800-380-8636 or 612-624-3434
15	Dairy Reproduction, Willmar, MN. Contact: Veterinary Outreach Programs, 800-380-8636 or 612-624-3434
16	Dairy Reproduction, Room 280 Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, University of Minnesota, St. Paul Campus. Contact: Veterinary Outreach Programs, 800-380-8636 or 612-624-3434
21	Livestock Odor Workshop II: Technical Training on Odor Intensity, Rating System & Odor Control, Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, MN. Contact: Kevin Janni 612-625-3108 or Judy Weicherding 612-625-4217
23-25	National Professional Dairy Heifer Growers 4th Annual Conference and Farm Tour, Hyatt Regency at Union Station, St. Louis, MO. Contact: Brenda Carlson 877-434-3377
25	Minnesota Holstein Association Spring Special & Youth Are Great Showcase, Rochester, MN. Contact: Pauline Bratt 320-259-0637
28, & April 4 11 & 18	Dairy Labor Management (4-part series), Rice, MN. Contact: Pat Kearney 320-231-7890 or Lee Gross 320-255-6169
29	Minnesota-Wisconsin Dairy Policy Conf., Earle Brown Center, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. Contact: Jerry Hammond 612-625-2749

APRIL

4, 11 & 18	Dairy Labor Management, (last 3 sessions of March 28 4-part series), Rice, MN. Contact: Pat Kearney 320-231-7890 or Lee Gross 320-255-6169
6 & 7	MN Junior Holstein Association Convention, Holiday Inn South, Rochester, MN. Contact: Pauline Bratt 320-259-0637

MAY

23-25	Dairy Herd Health Conference, Earle Brown Center, U of MN, St. Paul Campus. Contact: Veterinary Outreach Programs, 800-380-8636 or 612-624-3434

JUNE

20	Minnesota Holstein Association Field Day, Aho Brothers Dairy, Frazee, MN. Contact: Pauline Bratt 320-259-0637

JULY

11 & 12	MFGC Forage Expo 2000, University of Minnesota, West Central Research & Outreach Center, Morris, MN. Contact: Betty Schiefelbein 651-436-3930

Additions or changes to the Minnesota Dairy Calendar may be directed to:

Bonnie Rae
U of MN, Department of Animal Science
205 Haecker Hall, 1364 Eckles Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108-6118

Telephone: 612-624-4995 / Fax: 612-625-1283
Email: raexx001@tc.umn.edu

http://www.ansci.umn.edu/dairy/DairyCalendar.htm

MINNESOTA DAIRY LEADERS ROUNDTABLE

MISSION: "To develop and implement a shared vision of the Minnesota dairy sector through strengthening its competitiveness, profitability and social vitality."

Keep Moving Ahead

Continued from page 6

Unfortunately, as you no doubt have noticed, there is a universal force that causes deterioration, decay, and breakdown. This is called entropy. Turnover in employees, taking short cuts, wearing out of equipment, and running out of supplies are all examples of entropy. To prevent entropy from sending processes into the "state of chaos," you must continually look for and counteract its effects—repair and maintain equipment, train employees, and so on. The more proactive and consistent you are in doing so, the more likely it is that you will reach and maintain the "ideal state."

How does this work in real life? Say your bulk tank SCC has exceeded the legal limit and you have to lower the bulk tank SCC or lose your market. This is a "state of chaos." Your initial reaction is probably to become a chaos manager and get SCC down to legal limits as soon as possible. You identify chronically high SCC cows and cull some. For high SCC cows not culled, you milk the high SCC quarter into a quarter milker. You achieve your goal. You are happy and feel temporarily out of trouble.

But wait! Even though the milk now meets legal standards, the processes have not changed. You have only moved from a "state of chaos" to the "brink of chaos." Without a change in process, this herd is doomed to slip back into chaos and the cycle will continue. To move toward the "ideal state," you must change the processes that led to the "state of chaos." In this case, that probably means doing things like improving sanitation to reduce the incidence of mastitis in your herd.

Where are you going with your dairy business? Are you getting better? Worse? Or just staying even? Are you a "chaos manager," or do you continuously improve your dairy operation?

Continuous improvement can make your operation more pleasant, productive, and profitable. By breaking your production into steps . . . setting performance targets . . . creating and carrying out a plan to reach those targets . . . then continously monitoring your operation to detect and deter the effects of entropy, you can reduce the time you spend in chaos and increase the time you find yourself achieving the "ideal state" for your dairy.

Composting Cows

With rendering services increasingly hard to come by, some dairy producers are looking for alternative methods for disposing of dead cows. Composting not only can be efficient and cost-effective, it also can provide a valuable source of nutrients and organic matter for your soil.

If you decide to start composting cow carcasses, you'll need a permit from the Minnesota Board of Animal Health (call 651/296-2942). You'll also need to follow state guidelines and any local zoning requirements. Contact your local zoning authority for more information.

A cow composting facility may be as simple or as complex as you make it. The main requirements are that it have an impervious (concrete or clay) weight-bearing pad and a roof, be made of rot-resistant material, and be large enough to handle your farm's needs.

For more information on cow composting, check out the West Central Research and Outreach Center's *Composting Resource Notebook* ($15 plus $5 shipping). Call 320/589-1711 for ordering instructions.

John Bush © 2000

Composting How To

Bill Head, sheep scientist with the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, suggests the following procedure for composting cows:

1. **Put down one foot of straw. Cover it with one foot of solid manure or wood shavings/chips. Add the carcass.**
2. **Cover with one foot of manure-soiled bedding, then 6 to 8 inches of straw.**
3. **Monitor the internal temperature of the heap at least once per week. When it drops below 120 degrees, turn the heap by loading the heap into a manure spreader and redistributing it into the bin. Add moisture as needed and cover with another 6 to 8 inches of straw.**
4. **Continue temperature monitoring and turning (usually two turns) until the carcass is completely broken down.**
5. **Spread the finished compost on your field.**

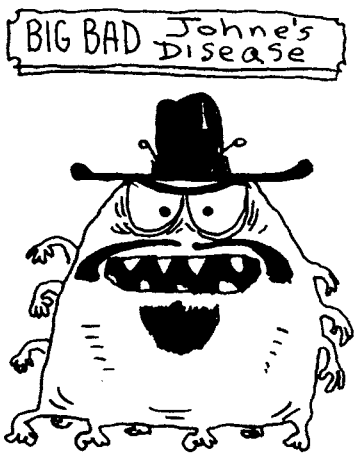
America's Least Wanted

These three thieves are out to destroy your farm. Can you help stop them?

Three infectious diseases—Johne's disease, bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), and Salmonella—cost Minnesota dairy farmers millions of dollars each year in lost productivity, premature culling, preventive and treatment costs, and animal deaths. In the future, they may even lead to lost ability to sell products from your farm. How can you keep them from ruining your operation?

Your first job is to keep these profit-robbers off your property. If they do break in, you need to keep them from spreading to healthy animals.

After you've read the "Un-Wanted" posters below, take a good look at your operation. What practices can you change to reduce the risk of disease in your herd?



JOHNE'S DISEASE

TRICKY TRAITS: The microbe that causes Johne's disease can survive for years in the Minnesota environment. An animal can be infected for years before it tests positive or shows signs of illness.

LOOK FOR: Weight loss and diarrhea in adult cattle, often a few weeks after calving; a drop in herd milk production.

HOW IT SPREADS: From manure to mouth; to calves through manure or milk; sometimes from mother to fetus.

HOW TO AVOID: Buy cattle only from herd status program herds.

IF IT'S ON YOUR FARM: Test all adult cattle once a year with blood test; follow up blood test positives with fecal culture. Keep calves away from adult cattle and manure, and avoid feeding milk or colostrum from test-positive cows. Consider culling those that culture positive. Don't use calving areas for sick animals. Limit maternity areas to one cow at a time. Don't let manure touch feed or water.

BOVINE VIRAL DIARRHEA (BVD)

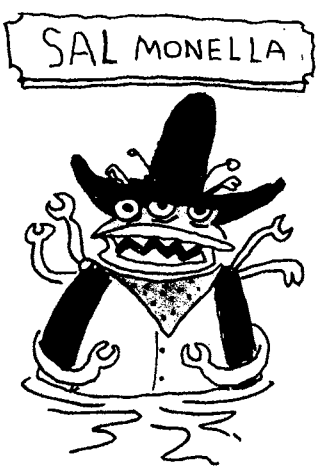
TRICKY TRAITS: Cattle infected before birth can give BVD to other animals throughout their lives, even though they never seem sick.

LOOK FOR: Breeding problems, abortion, calf death. May increase susceptibility to other illnesses.

HOW IT SPREADS: From cattle infected before birth (fetuses can get it from their mothers) or recently infected cattle (which usually don't appear sick). Spreads by nose-to-nose contact, sexual contact, or through urine or manure.

HOW TO AVOID: Only bring cattle onto your farm from known uninfected herds or herds with a good vaccination program. Test new cattle before arrival. Isolate new animals for 30 days.

IF IT'S ON YOUR FARM: Isolate sick and infected cattle and handle last when doing chores. Use disinfectant. Keep calves in hutches. If you suspect a problem, test cattle (including calves) as directed by your veterinarian and cull if positive.



SALMONELLA

TRICKY TRAITS: An animal can spread Salmonella without seeming sick. Salmonella can survive outside of animals for months.

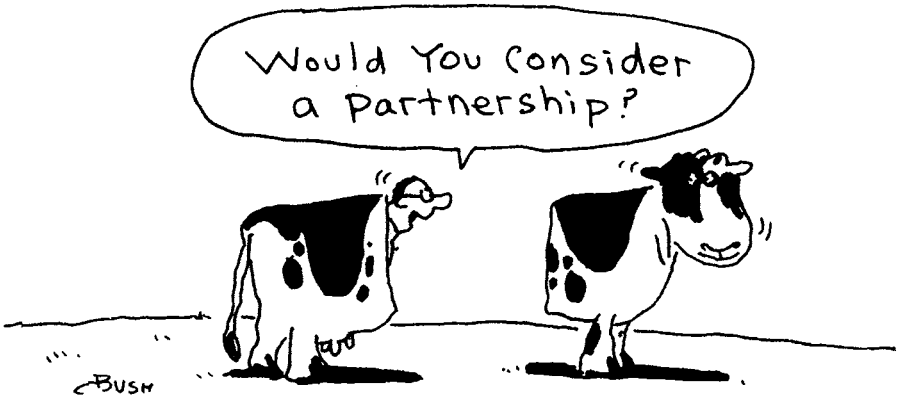
LOOK FOR: Diarrhea, fever, wasting, especially in calves.

HOW IT SPREADS: From manure to mouth; to calves through manure or milk; sometimes through dust.

HOW TO AVOID: Quarantine new animals. Have visitors who have been on other farms disinfect their boots or wear disposable boots before entering your dairy facilities. Don't bring in manure-contaminated equipment from another farm.

IF IT'S ON YOUR FARM: Keep manure and feed separate and handle with separate equipment. Sanitize calf feeding equipment. Don't feed raw milk or colostrum. Keep feed areas clean. Don't spread manure where cows will graze or on roughage you'll feed the same year. Separate sick and healthy cattle. Limit maternity housing to one animal at a time and clean and disinfect between uses. Caution: Salmonella also causes human disease. Wash hands after handling cattle (especially calves) and limit cattle contact with visitors.

Is There a Partnership in Your Future?



John Bush © 2000

If you're contemplating change, it's an option worth considering.

Thinking about expanding or modernizing your farm, but not sure whether you're willing or able to make the big leap on your own? One option is to form a partnership with another producer.

"If you look at the numbers, it can be just powerful," says Marv Siekman, farm business consultant with AgStar Farm Credit in St. Cloud. "It's not for everyone. But for people it works for, it's a tremendous financial planning tool, a way to leverage what you have into something much more. It's a 'one plus one equals three' type of situation."

What does it take for a partnership to succeed? "Number one is a positive mental attitude—and number two and number three and number four," says Siekman. "If you can visualize it, there's a lot higher probability you can do it."

A well-formed partnership offers many benefits:

- **Shared responsibility.** A partnership can reduce the pressure you would feel as the only one in charge of an expanded or updated operation.
- **More resources.** A partnership expands the resources available to the enterprise—not only money, but time, talent, and brainpower as well.
- **Room for specializing.** A partnership can allow each of the partners to develop a specialized expertise. For example, one partner might be responsible for cropping and the other for the animals.
- **Economy of scale.** A partnership allows you to use your resources more efficiently. For example, the cost of building a parlor can be spread across two farms' worth of cows rather than just one.
- **Backup.** A partnership can provide an automatic backup if you get laid up or take a vacation.

Partnerships can make sense for young or old, equity rich or equity poor. They aren't for everyone, however. You need to be willing to give up some of your independence. You need to be able to compromise, to get by without having the final say about what happens on your farm. You need to have personal traits a person would want in a partner—a good reputation, good communication skills, good management skills, honesty, reliability, and so on. And you need to find the right partner—someone whose vision, personality, management style, philosophies, goals, work style, and so on mesh well with yours.

Getting Started

If you think you might be interested in exploring a partnership, a good first step is to get advice from someone who's had some experience with it, either personally or as an advisor. Ask what the positives and negatives are, what works and what doesn't. Your extension dairy educator (see back page of this newsletter) can be helpful here, as can lenders and farm business management instructors.

The next step is to find a partner. Maybe you have someone in mind. If you don't, let other producers, lenders, vendors, and others know what you're thinking about. Word of mouth does wonders. "Build as big of a web as you possibly can—you never know which lead is going to play out," Siekman says.

Finally, if and when you and a prospective partner connect, spend plenty of time exploring whether you're right for each other. When Siekman meets with prospective partners, he gives them a workbook that lets them assess both their financial ability to enter into a partnership and the many nonfinancial considerations involved, such as management style, goals, and personality. You may wish to hire a facilitator to help you assess your ability to enter into a strong, workable business relationship.

The exploration process should include a look at the future, too. Realistically examine whether the partnership you are proposing would be able to generate enough income to meet the needs of both families involved. And when you're working out the details of the partnership, don't forget to include provisions for dissolving it if a death, divorce, or other unforeseen circumstance should make that necessary.

Beyond the Bottom Line

Depressed? Who—ME?

MADGE ALBERTS
Children, Youth and Families Program Leader, University of Minnesota

Everyone gets down in the dumps once in a while. Heck, the current milk prices are enough to make even the most sturdy farmers a bit on edge. These feelings of depression are usually brief, and have only slight effects on our daily lives.

But prolonged depression can take hold without our even realizing it. It has the potential to wreak havoc not only with our own life, but with the lives of those around us. And very often, the person who is depressed is the last one to recognize it.

Depression can begin as feeling sad, or "having the blues." But not all depression feels this way. Sometimes depression is more a case of feeling nothing at all, or feeling numb or empty.

Below are some symptoms of depression. If someone you know has more than a couple of these—especially if they are new behaviors—or if even one symptom is present in an extreme way, it could mean that they are depressed. To help them get their feet back on the ground and feel better about life, encourage them to seek help from a medical or mental health professional or clergyperson.

Keeping alert to signs of depression and acting on them early can help prevent long-term, debilitating depression.

It's important to note that the following signs do not always indicate depression, and there may be other signs not included on this list. But these are commonly recognized signs of depression.

Physical Signs

Change in eating habits (eating too much, too little)

Unwillingness to take care of physical appearance (shower, shave, wash/comb hair, etc.)

Change in sleep habits (unable to sleep, or sleeping too much)

Inability or decreased ability to concentrate

Loss of interest in sex

Headaches

Emotional Signs

Feelings of guilt

Low self-esteem

Negativity

Hopelessness

Feelings of inadequacy

Behavioral Signs

Difficulty getting started or putting things off

Difficulty going about daily life and/or work

Slow or reduced activity

Avoiding people

Greater focus on problems than pleasures

Little things create extreme reactions

Not enjoying activities formerly enjoyed

Difficulty making decisions

Excessive and unconscious watching of television

New or excessive use of alcohol or other drugs

Thoughts or threats of suicide

People who are depressed may not recognize it in themselves. Likewise, it may be hard for family members or friends to admit that depression may be present, or to take action to help the person. Yet this is exactly what is needed.

How to Help Yourself

If you feel you may be at risk for depression, there are some things you can do to help avoid it.

• **KEEP BUSY.** Cutting yourself off from work, family, and friends reinforces depression.

• **STAY ACTIVE.** Exercise and physical activity helps the body produce chemicals it needs to counteract depression.

• **TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.** Find someone who's willing to listen and talk. Particularly if you're a man, this might be hard for you. Push yourself to do it. It will help.

• **WATCH YOUR DIET.** Eat healthy foods to keep your energy level high.

• **READ.** Many self-help books and pamphlets are available to help you understand your emotions and overcome problems.

• **BE OPEN TO HELP.** Let other people help you. Seek professional help if you feel out of control.

How To Help Someone Else

• **LISTEN.** Be available if the person wants to talk. Encourage him or her to talk without pressuring.

• **BE PATIENT**—even if he or she isn't.

• **WATCH CAREFULLY** for signs of suicide such as direct suicidal threats (particularly if the person seems to have a plan), making preparations or final plans for a family to live without him or her, giving away prized possessions, sudden and unexplained changes in behavior or mood swings, or comments about not being around much longer.

• **DON'T PRESSURE** the person to "snap out of it." He or she probably can't.

• **DON'T SAY,** "I know exactly how you feel." You probably don't.

If you feel significant depression or risk of suicide is present, be as assertive as you need to be in getting the person to see a clergyperson, doctor, or counselor. This may mean actually making the appointment and taking them to it.

The current massive changes in agriculture, and the way in which those changes are affecting individual farmers—especially those whose identities are very closely tied to farming—creates an environment where depression is a very real possibility. Keeping alert to signs of depression in yourself and others, and acting on them early, can go a long way toward helping prevent long-term, debilitating depression.

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DAIRY *Initiatives*

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