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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

College of Veterinary Medicine

VETERINARY CONTINUING EDUCATION



ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
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TMF Update:
Clinical Rotations at the College of Veterinary Medicine
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The University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine has affiliated with the owners of Baldwin and Emerald Dairies in western Wisconsin to develop a unique education and research facility for training veterinary students, for providing continuing education of veterinarians and education programs for dairy professionals, and for conducting advanced clinical and applied research. The 2,500-cow Emerald Dairy and Baldwin dairies are one hour from the Twin Cities metro area. The first cows moved into the TMF in January 2002.

The Transition Management Facility houses approximately 400 cows through their dry period and through the two weeks after calving. Between 8 and 10 cows calve in the facility each day. The College oversees standard treatment protocols and animal management procedures in the facility. Senior veterinary students who are interested in dairy or mixed practice may elect to spend one or more two-week rotations in the TMF. Each rotation involves 2 to 4 students. They live in the facility during those two weeks so that they are available at all hours to participate in clinical care, follow up on cases, and respond to any emergencies. Students participate in the identification and treatment of sick cows, general health prevention programs (vaccinations, foot trimming, etc.) and day-to-day operations and monitoring. They also have the opportunity to see the operation of the main milking dairies and work with the feeding, labor management, and record keeping programs.

The college also hosts senior veterinary students from other veterinary schools who want to participate in this unique learning opportunity. This year students from North Carolina State University, Michigan State University, the University of Guelph, the University of Prince Edward Island, and the University of Saskatchewan participated in TMF rotations along with 13 Minnesota students. Nearly all of the students have chosen jobs that are either exclusively dairy or that involve a significant amount of dairy work.

Rotation days begin at 6:00 AM and may go until 6:00 PM. The morning is spent screening the fresh cow groups and administering any needed treatments. In addition to the routine herd health work, each student rides with the feeder for a morning and assists the regular milking personnel during at least two shifts during the rotation. Things very often quiet down after lunch, leaving the student time to learn on their own, participate in milking, help with new calves or process fresh cows, or go back and look at cases they treated earlier in the day. As the rotation passes and experience is gained, students are asked to function more and more autonomously.

Comments from students who have participated in the TMF rotation reveal that they enjoy the opportunity to gain hands-on experience diagnosing and treating common dairy cow diseases. The frequent calvings also provide a chance to practice obstetrical skills taught in on-campus teaching labs. The only complaint seems to be that the cows are “too healthy,” with relatively few opportunities for practicing DA surgery techniques.