

Leave No Dairy Calf Behind Educational Program

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Summary and Implications

Having healthy dairy replacements is critical to a farm's overall profitability and sustainability, whether heifers are grown on-farm or custom-raised. Utilizing 40 calf management surveys, 10 on-farm workshops, 3 webinars, and 20 individual visits, producers evaluated various calf feeding and management options to make a better decision on their farm to implement a program best suited for their management, labor, and financial structure. Long term application of this educational program will produce healthy dairy replacements that will improve profitability and productivity. Over 200 participants viewed and evaluated a calf feeding and management system, with nearly 10% in the process or completed the change, which may include improved housing and ventilation systems, installation of automated calf-feeders or pasteurizers, and enhanced nutritional feeding programs.

Introduction

Readers of the ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team newsletter indicated they would like to see more information to assist in calf management decisions. A 2012 dairy survey conducted by ISU Extension and Outreach indicated 40% of Iowa dairy farms would be making changes to calf facilities in the next 5 years. Twenty-five percent of dairy producers attending local Dairy Days meetings noted they have made changes to their calf management program based on the team's recommendations. The major program focus for the ISU Dairy Team in 2013-2014 was two-fold: to assist calf raisers in evaluating their current practices and potentially new calf housing and feeding systems; and enhanced management skills to operate these systems successfully.

Programmatic Response

The ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team, aided by a grant, reached every dairy producer in the state of Iowa, and many outside the state with educational newsletters, factsheets, and promotional materials to help increase knowledge to make more profitable decisions on their future calf program. A survey of current users of Automatic Calf Feeding Systems and Pasteurization Feeding Systems was done. An educational publication and an economic decision-making spreadsheet were written for the Automatic Calf Feeding System. Over 200 producers, along with many industry personnel attended the series of 10 on-farm

workshops with another 200 producers exposed to it through ISUEO Dairy Days programs. Another 50 dairy industry people were reached through live webinars with an additional 4000 contacts made through the ISU Dairy Team Extension website (factsheet downloads, archived webinars). Twenty producers received individual on-farm visits to assess their current calf management system and assist with implementation of future management systems. This included enhanced feeding programs, colostrum management, facility design, ventilation, automatic calf feeding systems, and pasteurizers.

Result and Discussion

An evaluation was mailed to participants that attended the 10 on-farm workshops. Seventy-one percent of the respondents were going to be making a change to their calf facility in the future. The field days provided them an opportunity to see how different facility, ventilation, and feeding systems worked, particularly a new technology of the automatic calf feeding systems and pasteurizers. Based on these participants attending the field days, they have made a decision to implement or not implement a feeding system, improve their current ventilation and take better care of cleaning equipment. Quote from dairy producer "I am in the beginning research phase for building a new calf facility. The on-farm calf workshops helped me learn about automatic calf feeders and seeing different setups allowed me to see what works and doesn't work". Two respondents were industry representatives and they will be using the information to understand the new feeding technologies and assist producers they work with on improving ventilation and helping them with feeding plans. Additionally, they reported the field days as being a high-value program.

A Qualtrics survey was emailed to participants that attended the 3 live webinars. Survey respondents agreed they have a better understanding of benchmarks used to evaluate a calf program, a better understanding of the importance of colostrum management in early life growth, and they agree they have discovered new ways to manage a colostrum feeding program. They responded they will re-evaluate their current calf feeding program based on what they learned from the webinar. One respondent said they learned the impact of outside temperature on the needs of the calf and the importance of added nutrients in the winter months. Respondents agree that they will use the webinar information to make informed decisions about managing and purchasing an automatic calf feeding system. A veterinarian who attended the webinar said "I will use the information to respond to questions I have received from a number of my clients".

Information was also presented to a group of veterinarian students during their dairy rotation and this was their response to the information learned: "As future

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veterinarians we now have a better understanding about what factors play into overall health of calves and how these factors can be managed to ensure the best calf health on the farm. Some of the key things we took away from this program was colostrum evaluation and management as well as the proper volume that must be fed to calves in a specific time frame. We learned how to evaluate calf housing facilities for proper air flow, temperature, protection from weather, isolation to prevent disease spread, and learned how to use nesting scores. We were able to practice measuring calf height and weight as well as IgG levels in the blood for proof of passive transfer. We can now take this information, apply it to our future careers and help educate dairy and beef producers on these factors that affect early calf health.”

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