Midwest Dairy Day Focuses on Automatic Calf Feeders: Feeding the Next Generation

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Summary and Implications

The Midwest Dairy Day provides a one day learning opportunity for producers, industry, and potentially new dairy producers to network and engage in a current topic. With support from the dairy industry and business community, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Northeast Iowa Community College, and Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation, this program has continued to provide valuable information.

Introduction

The Midwest Dairy Day is held every year in late fall and takes place at the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation near NICC Campus in Calmar, IA. A current topic related to the dairy industry is offered every year based on producer and industry input. The event runs from 10 AM – 3 PM and draws participants from Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In 2016, 54 participants attended along with 2 presenters and 1 host farm.

Materials and Methods

With an increased interest in automatic calf feeders and the need to move calves indoors to manage these systems, calf barn design can greatly impact the health and growth of young dairy calves. Long-term, this can have impact on milk production and overall animal performance. Over the past few years, research has discovered important features of calf barn design and management (number of calves per pen, space per calf, ventilation, milk intake, cleanliness, and machine maintenance) that highly influence calf performance, particularly in a group-housed system with automatic calf feeders.

ISUEO Dairy Field Specialist, Jenn Bentley, provided the latest research in managing dairy calves utilizing group-housing systems. This was followed by Courtney Halbach, Associate Outreach Specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Dairyland Initiative, who discussed the practical considerations in building design and management for group-housed calves using automatic calf feeders.

The program was enhanced by having a ventilation demonstration inside the calf barn at Iowa's Dairy Center. This allowed participants to ventilation measurements and tools used to troubleshoot air quality within calf barns. Participant then travelled to the host farm near Ridgeway, of Kevin and Gayleen Moellers. The Moeller's farm currently houses six groups of calves in a cross-ventilated facility; utilizing automatic calf feeders and feeding pasteurized milk.

Results and Discussion

Overall the participants and presenters felt that the event was valuable. There was an increase in knowledge with each presentation. There was an increase of knowledge of 36% in "A Research Update", and 41% increase with "Automatic Calf Feeder Facility Design".

Participants walked away from the program with new ideas on barn design, realized the importance of cleanliness and management, and ventilation requirements for young calves. As an industry participant, they learned how this technology is impacting the industry and research based talking points they can use with producers that may be interested in building a calf barn or implementing an automatic calf feeder. Producers gained a better understanding of ventilation and its importance to calf health. Ideas they plan to use include: calf barn design guidelines, all-in/all-out system, increase space per calf, increase drainage, and implement a warm weather positive pressure tube.

Participants found the ventilation demonstration and farm tour valuable. They learned more about airflow standards, how air is drawn in using a positive pressure tube and how these systems can be placed in a calf barn, and management of the automatic calf feeder system.

Acknowledgements

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