

Start to Farm: New Farmer Learning Network's Dairy Series

A.S. Leaflet R3238

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Summary and Implications

Start to Farm: New Farmer Learning Networks were for beginning and early-career farmers looking for an edge in managing and growing their farm business. The ISUEO Dairy Team provided an opportunity to address ways to improve business practices and production techniques, tour successful farm operations, and form a community to share new ideas and profitable farming methods. The goal of the networks was to provide an open atmosphere for discussion, sharing of ideas and learning about resources for producers who are in their first 10-12 years of dairy farming. It is important to help producers make sound dairy farm management decisions that are backed by current and relevant information. Based on pre-post evaluations of all in class sessions and a follow up evaluation 1 month post workshops and dairy tours, participants attending the Start to Farm Dairy Series are making better decisions in different areas of their operation or prospective operations. They can evaluate the effect making changes has on their operation, which will increase profitability and sustainability of new and early career dairy farmers to continue in the business.

Introduction

The average age of primary farm operators increased by 2% between 2007 and 2012. Census of Agriculture records show, during the same period, land values more than doubled in Iowa. Younger-aged pre-farm owners site start-up cost of operations as the primary obstacle to farming (2014 survey by Support Iowa Farmers). The USDA Census also showed that the age of even secondary and tertiary farm operators, while younger, increased by 4% and 3% respectively between 2007 and 2012. Iowa has the second largest farm economy of any state and is ranked 12th in milk production, generating \$4.9 billion in economic activity per year (Iowa's Dairy Industry: An Economic Review) and supporting nearly 22,000 jobs. With 212,000 dairy cows in the state, each cow generates \$23,445 of economic impact and value to an Iowa community. Providing new farmer learning networks are important to help producers make sound dairy farm management decisions that are backed by current and relevant information to remain profitable and sustainable in the dairy industry.

Programmatic Response

The ISU Extension and Outreach Team, aided by a grant, engaged approximately 30 prospective, new and beginning dairy producers across the state. Utilizing a technology called ZOOM, participants attended at one of four locations across the state. The groups were brought together remotely via the internet with the same topics presented at each site. Locations include Dubuque County ISUEO Office in Dubuque, Iowa's Dairy Center in Calmar, Iowa State University Campus in Ames, and Dordt College in Sioux Center. Jenn Bentley, Beth Doran, Hugo Ramirez, and Larry Tranel were the facilitators at each location. Participants were encouraged to attend all or some of the dates, which have included in 2016-17:

- Nov. 17 - How to Get Started
- Dec. 1 - Cost-Effective Facilities
- Dec. 8 - Feeding the Herd
- Dec. 15 - Crop Nutrient Management
- Jan. 12 – The People Side of Dairy
- Jan. 26 - Raising Calves & Heifers
- Feb. 16 – Herd Health & Records
- March 1 & 2 - Dairy Tours, TBD

The program started at noon and concluded by 2 p.m. Each session started with introductions around the state with a roundtable question specific to the topic being presented. Participants received the presenter's handouts with additional resources for follow-up. All sessions were videotaped and archived for future participants.

Result and Discussion

Seven in-class sessions were completed with a pre-post learning evaluation filled out after each session. Scales were 1-10 for each question, with 1 = limited to know knowledge and 10 = expert knowledge. Total scores of all participants for each question (before and after) were tallied, total numerical gain (difference between after vs. before) was calculated, then average absolute gain/ question/ participant was calculated. The sessions were highly successful in knowledge transfer and stemmed great interests and plans for future opportunities and changes.

November 17th, Managing Dairy Farm Finances -- Tranel	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
	20 =n Gain			
1. Understanding the Dairy TRANS Financial Analysis Software	35	107	72	3.60
2. Understanding the Economics of Dairy Farm Systems	78	125	47	2.35
3. Understanding the ISU Extension Dairy Budgets	59	118	59	2.95
4. Understanding the Options for Beginning Dairy Farmers	80	132	52	2.60
5. Understanding How to Analyze Profitability	63	128	64.5	3.23
Has workshop been of high value for you?	Yes	No	% Yes	
	19	0	100%	

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December 1st, Facilities -- Bentley, Tranel	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
23	=n			Gain
1. Cost Effective Facilities: Calf to Cow	132	180	47.5	2.07
2. Milking Systems: Low Cost to AMS	110	177	67	3.05
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	21	2	91%	

December 8th, Feeding the Dairy Cow -- Ramirez-Ramirez	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
17	=n			Gain
1. Understanding the Nutrient Requirements of a Dairy Cow	73	120	47	2.76
2. Understanding the Supply of Nutrients from Various Feeds	77	117	40	2.35
3. Evaluation of corn silage quality and management	86	127	41	2.41
4. Understanding different feed additives for dairy cows	71	111	40	2.35
5. Understanding How to evaluate feeding and nutrition	70	112	42	2.47
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	17	0	100%	

December 15th, Managing Soil Nutrients -- Lang	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
15	=n			Gain
1. Understanding the importance of soil sampling	54	98	44	2.93
2. Understanding how and why to send soil samples to certified lab	41	94	53	3.53
3. Reading a soil test and interpreting recommendations	36	88	52	3.47
4. Understanding the Corn N Rate Calculator	38	79	41	2.93
5. Understanding how to take a manure sample	43	89	46	3.29
6. Reading the manure test and calculating recommendations	37	87	50	3.57
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	14	2	88%	

January 12th, Human Resoure Management--Communication	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
12	=n			Gain
1. Understanding the importance of job analysis and description	54	82	28	2.55
2. Understanding how job descriptions can be communication too	58	89	31	2.58
3. Understanding how to recruit and evaluate new team members	52	90	38	3.17
4. Understanding the importance of team member turnover cost	44	83	39	3.25
5. Understanding how on-boarding and orientation impact turnover	40	83	43	3.58
6. Understanding ways to think about addressing conflict	47	76	29	2.64
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	11	1	92%	

Jan 26th, Calves and Heifers--Bentley	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
16	=n			Gain
1. Understanding importance of colostrum	98	130	32	2.00
2. Understanding pre-weaning calf nutrition	94	134	40	2.50
3. Understanding heifer nutrition mgmt.	88	127	39.5	2.47
4. Understanding heifer growth guidelines	88	129	41	2.56
5. Understanding grazing to reduce heifer \$	80	121	41	2.56
6. Understanding economics of heifer raising	82	123	41	2.56
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	15	0	100%	

Feb 16th, Health: Milkq Quality and Reproduction, Timms	Beg	End	Gain	Ave
14	=n			Gain
1. Understanding importance and use of individual SCC	74	104	30	2.14
2. Understanding decisions on problem cows	77	105	28	2.00
3. Understanding pregnancy rate&factors influencing this value	64	98	34	2.43
4. Understanding importance of voluntary waiting period	65	100	35	2.50
5. Understanding importance of fresh cows to SCC/Repro/Profits	68	104	36	2.57
6. Understanding economics/importance of heifer repro&calves	74	107	33	2.36
	Yes	No	% Yes	
Has workshop been of high value for you?	12	1	92%	

A final evaluation was administered one month post network series to evaluate program and additional value of program. Seven participants completed the Qualtrics survey on-line. Seventy-one percent rated the overall value of the Start to Farm Series high, 28.5% rated it a medium value. When asked what they liked best about the series, responses included: I liked the classes and how the instructors would individualize the curriculum; different topics every week from different sources of input; farm tours were also very good; enjoyed the overview of topics, but now would like to dive deeper into specifics; informational session and farm tour; meet other likeminded people; topics were focused so if you couldn't make each session you could pick and choose; wide variety of information for all ages of animals. Thirty-three percent **MADE** changes in their operation since attending the Series in the areas of Raising Calves & Heifers and Herd Health & Records, while 16% made changes in dairy farm finances, feeding the dairy herd, crop nutrient management, and the people side of dairy. Some of these changes included changing the feed ration, soil sampling, focusing on other ways to communicate to handle different situations, feeding calves longer on milk and not weaning until they consume 4-6 lbs of grain per day, and started a better logging of health records and breeding schedules. Fifty-percent **PLAN** to make changes in their operation in the areas of cost-effective facilities, raising calves and heifers, and herd health and records. Thirty-three percent plan to make changes in dairy farm finances, feeding the herd, and the people side of the dairy.

These plans include eventually building a calf facility, looking at possibilities for retrofit barns and calf facilities, low cost methods for feeding, talking with the nutritionist on changing feed rations, feeding calves a higher plane of nutrition, and looking at better options for a better conception rate.

Value of changes made include: 43% \$0-\$1000, 43% \$1000-\$5000, and 14% > than \$10,000.

Since attending the Start to Farm Series, they would like ISUEO to assist them with other resources on their current or prospective operations through on-farm visits and evaluations, more resources on dairy beef, and training on PC DART program. 100% of respondents are interested in more classes like the Start to Farm Series and are willing to meet multiple times a year.

Based on pre-post evaluations of class sessions and follow up evaluation 1 month later, participants are making better decisions in different areas of their operation or prospective operations. They can evaluate the effect making changes has on their operation, which will increase profitability and sustainability of new and early career dairy farmers to continue in the business.

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