

Automatic Calf Feeder Field Day Enhances Calf Management

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Summary and Implications

Precision management in calf care is needed as there are many ways to add value to these heifers before they join the milking string. A one-day workshop was hosted on August 31, for a first-hand look at how fellow dairy farmers are housing pre-weaned calves using technology to help manage their calf program. These included automatic calf feeders, pasteurizers, and milk cooling systems. Areas of focus included basic sanitation for automatic calf feeders, equipment hygiene, and housing and ventilation.

Introduction

Precision management in calf care has been an emphasis in the dairy industry in the last 5-10 years as producers are finding new and efficient methods of raising calves. With the onset of robotic technology, automatic calf feeders have been implemented to improve labor efficiency, enhance calf nutrition and calf social behavior. However, not every producer has the same set-up and management on their farms, making it challenging to implement these technologies. Housing, feeding, and health management are critical components when implementing this technology.

Programmatic Response

The ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team, partnered with industry representatives to provide a one-day workshop to demonstrate best management practices in group housing systems. The day included hands-on demonstration of colostrum evaluation tools, hygiene testing equipment to evaluate calf equipment sanitation, and a ventilation demonstration to observe air quality within calf barns. This was enhanced by visiting three very different barns; a newly constructed calf barn, a retrofit hoop housing system, and a milking parlor retrofitted to group house calves. Each producer provided insight on successes and challenges of each system and were able to provide hands-on learning to fellow producers and industry professionals who work with dairy producers

Result and Discussion

Sixty producers and industry representatives attended the one-day workshop. Twenty-two provided feedback through an evaluation that was distributed at the last farm stop of the day. The dairy producer respondents raise between 80-1000 calves on a yearly basis. The industry representative respondents will share the information learned with up to 300 producers; increasing their ability to get gain in calves and breed earlier and help them with

cleaning management. One-hundred percent of participants noted that the program was of high value to them.

When asked one thing they learned today, they responded:

- (6)-Cleaning routine/frequency,
- (4)-Different ventilation systems
- Pasteurization
- maintenance of automatic calf feeders
- how autofeeders work
- we can feed and house calves in a variety of ways but principles of space, ventilation, and cleanliness are critical
- different styles of barns and owner's choices on them based on what they have to work with, everything was new to me.

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