

Dairy Directions Program Series Brings Information to Isolated Audiences

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Summary and Implications

The vast majority of dairymen and dairy cows in northwest Iowa are in the six most north-westerly counties. That translates to most Extension dairy programs are proximal to the dairymen and cows. However, there are pockets of dairies in and around Sac and Pocahontas counties. A Dairy Directions workshop series was developed focused on current dairy issues and topics for these 2 areas. 32% of dairies in these areas attended (11 dairies and 25 dairy producers as well as employees and agribusiness). The workshop ranked highly and was very successful with knowledge gained in all subject areas and presentations based on a pre-post meeting evaluation. Participants expressed interest in this series continuing and defined topics for future sessions.

Introduction

A review of major dairy programs in NW Iowa found it was rare that a dairyman from Sac and Pocahontas counties would attend our programs. To accommodate these dairymen, the Dairy Directions series was established focusing on topics identified in the current Dairy Days programing in eastern Iowa. A review of the two areas found that the target audience included 34 operating dairies. Conversations with county staff indicated producers in their areas had attended local programs in the past and had expressed interest in dairy programing.

Results and Discussion

Twenty five dairymen representing 11 dairies attended the program for an attendance of just over 32 percent. The program was evaluated with a pre-post retrospective tool at the conclusion of the day with 12 of the 25 participants responding for a response rate of 48 percent.

Concerning the demographics of attendees: 75 percent self-identified as white and 25 percent identified as Hispanic with 84 percent male and 16 percent female.

Seventy-five percent of those reporting were between 30 and 54 years of age.

Dairymen responding had an average herd size of 415 head with the largest at 1600 milk cows and the smallest at 60 cows. The majority grew their own heifers, averaging 108 on feed. Three herds indicated they contracted their heifers raised with an average of 960 head on feed.

Market terminology seemed confusing; when asked to estimate their “breakeven” cost of production, the average response was \$14.60 per cwt., with a range of \$13 - \$16 per cwt. That question was followed by asking for their current “farmgate” milk price. The average was \$17.10 per cwt., with a range of \$15 - \$19 per cwt.

When asked what their top two issues for future Extension dairy programs would be, the over-whelming topic at 32 percent was managing cost of production with dairy herd health in second place.

The top ag app used by those attending was Ag pHD followed by PC Dart with the number of apps on their phones ranging from zero to 15.

When asked about the speakers, 100 percent of the responses indicated they were knowledgeable, presented well and used relevant examples.

We also queried specific educational topics. With an average change in understanding of 2.4 in four levels, the top concept was how inventory and US milk price are related. Next, with an average change of 1.5 was identifying what ag apps are available to help manage the dairy herd.

Then with an average change of 1.08 were two concepts– how alternative forages can be used in milking herd rations and understanding what an app is on a smartphone.

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