

# DAIRY PIPELINE

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## DECISIONS DETERMINE YOUR FARM'S DIRECTION

Dairymen on many small to moderate size operations often assume dual roles of management and laborer—milker or feeder and CEO. Getting consumed by daily tasks can be an obstacle to effective farm management on dairies of any size.

Kevin Dhuyvetter, of the Kansas State Department of Agricultural Economics, noted that there are greater differences in profit between farms in a given year than in a single farm from year to year.

(*Factors Impacting Dairy Profitability: An Analysis of Kansas Farm Management Association Dairy Enterprise Data*, August, 2011). The implication is that while dairy industry macroeconomic trends such as milk prices or cost of production are important, long-term business direction and profitability ultimately rest on each farm's primary decision-maker(s).

Data from the Kansas State publication indicated that of the factors studied, milk production per cow is most closely related to profitability. The most profitable herds were slightly better at cost control on a per cow basis, but spread all costs over more pounds of milk sold. In fact, more profitable farms tended to invest more in the cows in terms of nutrition, breeding, and veterinary care than less profitable farms, offsetting these investments by controlling costs not directly tied to the cows. There may be a parallel lesson here regarding time management. Dairymen should invest time in managing the key profit center on the farm. Management time should be devoted to identifying and addressing obstacles to production. Here are some questions to help refocus a manager when sitting down with their records.

Is nutrition or cow comfort limiting production? What are the production trends? Did yield change with a diet change? How

many cows are lying for at least 12-14 hours per day? Does production decline significantly during hot weather?

Is fresh cow management limiting production? How are peak yields trending? Are greater than 5% of cows leaving the herd in the first 30 days, or greater than 10% in the first 90 days? What are the rates of fresh cow problems, retained placenta, metritis, and milk fever?

Is mastitis limiting production? What are current and past somatic cell count scores? Is the farm dumping milk from more or less than 2% of the cows? Are cows freshening with mastitis or do they develop it once in the milking string? Are new infections and chronic cases each <10% of the herd?

Is heifer development limiting production? Are 1<sup>st</sup> lactation cows peaking at 80% of 2<sup>nd</sup> lactation cows or 75% of 3<sup>rd</sup> and later lactation cows? Is their projected ME milk within 500 lb of older cows?

Is reproduction limiting production? Is the 21 day pregnancy rate 20% or better during most of the year?

Most of these questions can easily be answered from a simple one page herd summary such as the DHI 202 report. Once a deficiency is identified, more detailed information can be attained and action steps taken to address it. Many farms use external experts as part of a management team, particularly if taking time with records is difficult. Choosing not to take time to manage is itself a decision, but the consequences of that choice results in a lack of direction for the farm. Make it a priority to sit down regularly to consider the farm's status and plot its future course.

—Kevin Spurlin

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## Upcoming Activities

**Jan. 13-17, 2014**  
Annual Dairy Conferences

**Feb. 19–21, 2014**  
VSFA & VT Nutrition “Cow College”, Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke, VA.

See [VTDairy](#) for details.

*If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.*

“...address trends in feed manufacturing, market trends in animal agriculture, and the latest information in animal (more specifically dairy cattle) feeding and management.”

## VIRGINIA STATE FEED ASSOCIATION & THE VIRGINIA TECH NUTRITION “COW COLLEGE”

Several years back the annual conference of the VA State Feed Association and VT Dairy Nutrition combined programs to create a unique event offering educational opportunities for those in feed manufacturing, dairy nutrition consulting and those dairy producers with a special interest in improving the feeding management and nutrition of their herds. The 2014 conference will be held in Roanoke, Virginia from Feb. 19-21. This year’s theme, “What’s next?”, will address trends in feed manufacturing, market trends in animal agriculture, and the latest information in animal (more specifically dairy cattle) feeding and management.

The kick-off presentations will focus on wider policy and market related issues. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Roger Cady from Elanco, will speak on the challenges of feeding a growing world population. Representatives from the feed industry lobby will discuss Washington politics related to animal agriculture and the feed industry. Henry Graves from Bunge will discuss views on the US and global feed grain markets for the coming year, and the final presentation will deal with issues facing the transportation of both feed and animals in the U.S.

Beginning on Thursday morning, Congressman Bob Goodlatte is scheduled to discuss the recent challenges faced in Washington with the budget as well as immigration. A second keynote speaker is Mr. Jim Perdue, the chairman and advertising spokesperson for Perdue Farms. Additional speakers will address what’s next in feed additives and feed mill technology.

Dairy focus begins with the afternoon program, which will appeal to dairy producers, veterinarians and nutritionists alike. Highlights of the program include:

– Dr. Mike Blair (Pilgrims) [We are at Valine. Where are you?](#) Blair challenges the dairy industry to achieve the successes of the poultry industry in amino acid nutrition.  
– Dr. Bob Patton (Nittany Nutrition) [The practical side of amino acid nutrition in dairy cattle.](#) A consultant and developer of Nittany Cow Dairy Ration software shares experiences in formulating and delivering

diets with optimal amino acid nutrition.

– Dr. Normand St. Pierre (Ohio State) Comparison of feedstuff costs and the current dairy situation. Dr. St. Pierre consults with large dairy herds nationwide and is well-known for his management expertise.

– Dr. Tom Jenkins (Clemson University, retired) [You control milk fat depression. Don’t let it control you!](#) Dr. Jenkins is a nationally respected authority on fat metabolism of dairy cattle and feeding management to prevent costly milk fat depression.

– Dr. Gordie Jones (Central Sands Dairy, WI) A veterinarian who has been involved with the establishment of multiple large dairy operations and is well-known for his views on management practices.

– [Dino Giacomazzi](#) (CA Dairy Producer) [Mobile technology on the farm.](#) A 4<sup>th</sup> generation dairy producer and writer for Dairy Today who is an advocate for sustainable practices in dairy production and farming.

– Dr. Norman St. Pierre (Ohio State) [How do forage quality measures translate to value to the dairy?](#)

– Keith Sather (KS Dairy Consulting, Supervisor Systems Software) [Effectively Managing Feeders and Feed Management Software.](#) “Feed Supervisor”, one of the more popular feed management software programs, is based upon his experiences as a dairy consultant.

– Dr. Dana Tomlinson (Zinpro) [Digital Dermatitis, an Endemic Claw Disease. What can we do to control it?](#) Dr. Tomlinson is a VT DASC graduate with extensive experience dairy cow foot health maintenance.

– Dr. Gonzalo Ferreira (VT Dairy Science) Our new Dairy Management Extension Specialist, will discuss upcoming dairy management extension programs.

– Dr. Bob James (VT Dairy Science) [Managing the critical control points of the calf operation.](#)

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Details and registration information will be available at [VTDairy](#).

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For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at [VTDairy](#) —Home of the Dairy Extension Program at: [www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu](http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu).



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