

RAISING DAIRY HEIFERS AT LARSON DAIRY, INC.

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We have been raising dairy heifers since before we even had a dairy. In the 1930's, as a boy, I purchased calves from local dairies for one dollar a head and tried to raise them. It became my project as a FFA member. After the end of World War II, when I started a small dairy farm, I began to raise a few of the top cows' calves. We have always raised some of our replacements. However, since 1958 we have been raising most of our replacements and during the last 10 years we have been raising enough to meet our current needs and expand some. Just to give you some idea, we had approximately 4,400 cows on hand as of January 1, 1976. During 1975, we culled 1025 cows and added 995 home-raised heifers. During the same period we started 1870 calves. Of those calves, death losses amounted to 136 calves or about 8%.

Fifty-seven home-raised heifers were sold due to breeding problems. Breeding problems were diagnosed as being still open at an age of 2 1/2 to 3 years.

Our calf and heifer population normally about equals our adult cow herd in total numbers. On January 1, 1976, we had a little over 8000 head of dairy cattle.

The following is a brief description of our replacement program. First, we have found that adequate financing is necessary since a lot of capital is required from the day you start the calf until she is ready to enter the milking herd as a young cow. Also, we find that it takes a little over \$400 per animal to raise a heifer. About one-third of this amount is needed during the first 6 months and the balance spread out over the next two years. Heifers raised at Larson's dairies are about 30 months old when they enter the herd. We would rather have them freshen at 2 years of age, but to date we have not been able to accomplish that.

Our dairy farm contains 3300 acres and is devoted to pasture for our heifers and hay for winter feeding. We raise our calves in portable 3'x 5' wood hutches. One end is covered by metal for protection from the sun and rain and the other is open. Calves receive milk from bottles and grain while they are in the hutches. While the calves are in the hutches, they are tattooed in order to identify them with their parents. Also, extra teats are clipped, a ring is placed in their nose to prevent nursing, and they are dehorned. Calves are normally weaned at about eight weeks and placed in small pastures of about 4-5 acres. Each pasture contains shade, water, fence line feed bunks, and a place for feeding hay. During their stay in the weaning lots, the heifers are Bangs vaccinated, fire branded on the right hip, and vaccinated for PI3, Lepto, IBR, and blackleg. They are placed on permanent pasture between 6 and 8 months of age. The feed is reduced from 10 lbs per day to the amount needed for good growth, but not enough to fatten. The smallest amount of grain received while on pasture is 2 lbs per day. Pasture grasses consist of a combination of pangola, bahia clover and Alica Bermuda. The pastures are

fertilized with lime as needed to grow grass for grazing and hay. The heifers are sprayed for flies and wormed as needed. Also, monlate dust is used to control flies. The feed is delivered to bunks with a bulk feed wagon and tractor. One man takes care of around 2000 heifers on pasture with weekend help for working cattle through pens to worm, vaccinate or spray for flies. One man is assigned to take care of the baby calves. His job involves feeding milk and grain and taking care of the calves in the weaning lots at each farm.

We are now breeding our heifers artificially to proven sires of their same breed. Information is obtained from the AI Association on the bulls and particular attention given to bulls with a history of ease of calving. So far we have not had any more trouble with the heifer having their first calf than when we used bulls. The heifers are bred from about the middle of September through June of each year. After a heifer has been diagnosed pregnant, we place them in a pasture containing hard breeders and clean-up-bulls. We start moving the heifer to the milking barn about 6 weeks before calving time to get them acquainted and accustomed to the new facilities and feeding procedures.

The primary purpose for raising replacements is to get better cattle that are already acclimated. Also, it reduces the possibility of introducing diseases into our herd as well as offering a tax advantage. At Larson's Dairy, we have found that growing dairy replacements offers a real enjoyment and the opportunity to watch and anticipate how a heifer or a group of heifers will develop and reach their potential as high producing cows.

There are problems connected with a herd replacement program. It requires more land area to raise them extensively, ties up capital, requires additional help, and last but not least requires more management. We have found that a heifer program is closely related to the operation of a dairy farm and would probably do better under separate management. The credit for a successful program falls on the men who work on it and make it operational. We have been fortunate to have that kind of people working in ours.