

DAIRYMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH INTENSIVE GRAZING

Jonathan Lamb, Piedmont Dairy, Trenton, FL
Joe Nickerson, Lemon Grove Dairy, Wauchula, FL

Comments by them that are reported here
were summarized by H. H. Van Horn and C. R. Staples

Jonathan Lamb. He reported on progress being made at Piedmont dairy since startup in November, 1994. The dairy is designed for 1400 cows (1200 lactating) and is located one mile north of Trenton, FL on route 129. Currently 1100 milking cows are producing 42 pounds/cow daily. The milking parlor, which is the only major barn for 1400 cows, is located centrally to two irrigation pivots totalling 400 acres. These irrigation pivots disperse only fresh water. The wastewater from the lagoons serving the milking parlor are utilized on pastures for the dry cows. The milking parlor area is the only place where manure is collected. No replacement heifers are reared on this farm.

Pastures under each 200-acre center pivot are grazed by two, 300-cow groups. The pastures are rotated every 14 days with new grass made available every 12 hours. Pastures are Cali bermudagrass (warm season) and rye, oats, and ryegrass (cool season). All grain is fed in the milking parlor, currently about 22 pounds per cow daily. It is a pelleted, 16% crude protein cocentrated. Hay is fed when pastures are not producing sufficient forage to meet cow needs.

Herd health observations thus far are: minimal dystocia, minimal metabolic disorders, good foot health. Breeding is done with bulls with one bull for each 25 cows in the breeding groups. Milk weights are recorded every 3 weeks with the dairy's meters, the dairy is not on a standard DHI program.

The next immediate challenge is summer. A method used successfully by Al and Desiree Wehner at Quitman, GA last year of putting shade cloth under the center pivot will be utilized.

The conclusion at this point is that the future looks good. More learning is needed but the system appears to offer a profit and a more attractive lifestyle.

Joe Nickerson. Lemon Grove dairy near Wauchula, Florida switched to an intensive, rotational grazing system about two years ago. Rather than relying on machinery to bring forage to their cows, they let their cows do the harvesting. Approximately 250 to 300 milking cows graze 150 acres which are established to common bermudagrass in the summer and to ryegrass in the winter. Soil tests are done every 6 months. Approximately 200 pounds of 20-5-10 is applied every 28 days.

The bermudagrass is grazed very close to the ground and is grazed when it gets about 6 inches tall. Cows are brought to a new paddock every milking so that each paddock gets a 28-day rest before being regrazed when growth is slow and a 14-day rest when growth is fast. A pelleted grain supplement is fed in the parlor at 24 pounds per day. Milk is weighed with personal meters monthly. Production of milk ranges from 40 to 50 pound per cow daily over the year. Bulls run with the cows and no artificial insemination is done. Calves appear to be smaller and

dystocia has not been a problem.

Major cost savings result from greatly reduced culling rates (currently 15%) compared to confined housing systems. Leg problems, mastitis, DA, and udder edema have been of little problem on the dairy. The ryegrass is spread with the fertilizer in November and January. Cows walk the seed into the sod as they graze. Supplemental feeds such as hay or one-shot mixes are purchased and fed in the pastures at times when grass production is low such as in April and November.

Joe said: "We are learning daily how to fine-tune our operation to improve efficiency but are very pleased at this point with intensive grazing. A key to success is to keep the system simple. We don't want to ever go back to any other system."