

Check-Off Committee Report

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It is both rewarding and exciting to be involved in an Advisory Committee to guide the use of funds provided by our industry to insure that the teaching, research, and extension programs in dairy science at the University of Florida are in line with our needs. We know that with the decline in public funding of agricultural research and with fewer grant opportunities research will not necessarily target farmer needs unless they participate in the process more than we did in the past. Dairy farmers, as good businessmen, have decided to make an investment in research and education through the Check-Off.

Although this review of the program focuses on a Decade of Results, allocations have now been awarded from 12 years of our Check-Off of 1.0 cents per cwt. of milk marketed. It is amazing that these contributions by individual dairy farmers have accumulated to almost \$3.0 million. And the research and education supported with those funds have made Florida dairy farmers much more competitive. Just the returns from implementing better heat stress management have more than paid for the program. Significant advances in reproduction and manure management have also been made. We know that not all of the research has been or will be successful. We just hope that dairymen learn as much from the research that didn't work out according to the researcher's hypothesis as they do from their own mistakes. And save money by having done it that way.

We are especially proud of the results we see from our support of Youth Programs. Hundreds of youth, mostly 4-Her's have been directly and positively impacted by Check-Off dollars.

The total of these research and education grants totals \$2,990,979, an average of \$250,000 awarded yearly. The grants have been made to a diverse set of projects ranging from undergraduate scholarships, transportation of youth to 4-H contests, materials for

¹ The following comments that these dairymen made in oral presentations at the conference were assembled from notes that they gave to H. H. Van Horn.

teaching, extension activities, support of visiting scientists, and mostly for research, both basic and applied. A summary of these grants includes:

Youth	\$ 305,800
Extension	62,840
<u>Research</u>	
Agronomy and soils	\$ 164,320
Production economics	113,850
Milk supply management	116,015
Herd health	267,129
Reproduction	439,364
Manure management	479,621
Heat stress	263,792
Milking management	55,186
Calves	131,105
Dry and transition cow	162,380
TOTAL	\$2,990,979

The 12-year experience of committee members recommending which grants to fund has shown that good projects in basic research have as high a success rate as applied and demonstration project proposals. All dairy farmers benefit from direct benefits from the research supported with this funding but some of the side benefits are nearly as rewarding, for example, 1) research and extension activities were selected to meet high priority needs of dairymen; 2) dairymen become very interested in the projects with the idea of incorporating positive outcomes into their management scheme; 3) because of dairymen involvement, the time interval between obtaining research results and adoption of the practice is minimal; 4) the benefit of leverage is important because our grants are an incentive to faculty members from other departments to direct their expertise to a dairy problem; 5) because of their closeness to the research projects, dairymen have confidence in the results and this increases their willingness to accept recommendations, and 6) the additional support funds available to UF dairy programs from the Check-Off often help attract additional state and grant funds that are directed to problems originally selected by dairymen on these committees. Many grant proposals reviewed by the committee were not funded but, in general, those fit a category or not appearing to be a worthy research project or being a project that is too far removed from dairy farmer priorities.

The past decade has seen a lot of advances in the Florida dairy industry but as we look to the future, Florida dairymen still face many problems. First and foremost is to remain competitive with other areas of the country in supplying our local markets. We need a better handle on cost control on Florida dairies if we are going to compete in a national marketplace. To remain competitive, it is obvious that we need more economic input into decision making and into developing strategies to reduce costs of production. The Dairy Business Analysis Project is a great first step but we need more. To that end, it is not out

of the question that we continue to direct and perhaps increase Check-Off funds to support business management and integrated systems research that will help our industry with these challenges. And off the farm, we need to be better prepared to deal with national issues in milk pricing and marketing. The University of Florida is way behind many other institutions in these areas. When the recent announcement of U.S.D.A. Federal Order Reform came out, the West, Upper Midwest, and Northeast responded immediately. Where was the Southeast? Dr. Martin, this is an area that we feel needs immediate attention.

Other challenges that we will face in the next decade include:

- Manure management -- How to turn cost into a positive return
- Cow comfort – We know that stress is our biggest roadblock. How are we going to make cows more comfortable

Another challenge, and perhaps an opportunity, is regionalization. As funding from state legislatures continues to decline, the dairy industry of the Southeast with Florida as the catalyst must look for ways to get more bang for our bucks in research and development. Regionalization is not a popular topic with other universities that are trying to maintain their identities. However, if Georgia passes their dairy referendum and reestablishes a Georgia Dairy Board to distribute research funds it could be a golden opportunity to force the issue of expanding our Check-Off Committee to include representatives of their dairy farmers and combine our research funds.

Although not without challenges, we are very optimistic as to the future of the Southeast dairy industry and we are proud to be participants.
