

Strategies for Dairying Success in the Future

Richard Waybright
Mason Dixon Farms, Inc.
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

29 Steps to Successful Dairying

1. Set vision goals (at least ten years ahead/dream possible potential).
2. Visit trend setting farms at least twice a year.
3. Read everything you can get your hands on. Think outside the box. You can't make an omelet without breaking the shell.
4. Facts of dairying are what we think are right. New concepts are put into practice by people who allow themselves to ask the question "why do we do things this way?"
5. We in farming are controlled by four basic parameters:
 - A. The weather - can't do much about it.
 - B. Cost of inputs - can nickel and dime suppliers but must pay the market price.
 - C. We get a milk check twenty days after sending to market for what they thought it was worth.
 - D. Efficiency - produce the desired result with a minimum of labor, expense, and maximum production.

Of these four, efficiency is the only thing that we as dairy farmers control to a large extent. Put your efforts into your operation and don't spend much gas running to government to solve our so called problems. I believe in less dependence on begging and more power in bargaining. Learn to bargain with strength by volume of milk with the highest quality. So let's zero in on efficiency, which is the opportunity which we have direct control over.

6. We "think" that finances are the limiting factor when it really is not the issue. A well planned concept that has a three to five year payback will always catch the banker's approval. Adversity could happen to make it take two more years which won't cause it to fail. If it doesn't meet this criterion, it's not worth the investment. To dairy with a lesser plan should cause you to stop dairying and invest in the stock market instead. Aim to dairy profitably, then it's exciting and challenging and not so stressful.
7. Now we are ready to begin an exciting, enjoyable, and efficient dairy system.
8. First, put that new born calf in a good environment so that it will be able to express

its true genetic potential. Bottle feed colostrum from frozen milk from the older cows in its first half hour of life. Don't let it nurse the cow period. Be sure to dip its navel with iodine at least twice in the first four hours of life. Repeat with like colostrum for second feeding with a nipple bottle.

9. Day two. Train it to drink from a bucket to save labor. Provide free choice nipple water supply in order to guarantee fresh water. It has the natural instinct to suck and will drink more of it; it's low cost and good for the calf. Hand feed in its mouth after the milk feeding with a good starter ration for at least three days to encourage ration consumption. Sour the cows' three day colostrum plus any hospital milk in an old bulk tank at 45 degrees F for twenty days. This milk is better and virtually free (not a \$50 bag of powdered milk per calf). Save money wherever you can.
10. Should be able to stop feeding milk in four to five weeks, not 60 days or so. Saves labor and cost of milk. The calf will do well.
11. Leave in same pen for one week after weaning to observe its individual grain consumption better.
12. Group it with not more than six calves of similar age in order to cut down on competition in a three sided shed facing southeast. Begin to feed corn silage and the same calf starter feed.
13. Three weeks after weaning blend starter ration with a good grower calf pellet for a week self feed. Fourth week, change to growers pellets. They are cheaper.
14. When they are eating four pounds of grower pellets per day then introduce TMR feeding.
15. Eye score them monthly and adjust ration to maximize growth.
16. It takes good groceries to get the heifer to 750 pounds by thirteen months. They are ready to be artificially bred with semen of known calving ease. Continue to maximize growth with a well balanced ration so that they weigh at least 1200 pounds at calving. For every month delayed calving cost is about at least \$75 per month and no milk check to support its cost.
17. I'm going to skip over the cow care area in order to keep to my 29 points, but raising the heifer well is where the profit starts to take place. Do it well with a goal of less than 2% mortality instead of as much as 10% to 15% experienced on many farms. If you accomplish this, the cow will have the ability to stay in the herd for five or more productive lactation, not the average three lactations of many farms. Remember it takes the second lactation to begin to see a net profit. So let's equip them to have the potential to be profitable. This system takes less labor, feed, and has the potential for much higher profit.

18. The dairy cow profitability is often limited by forages that were made weeks too late (not at the right stage of maturity). Remember also after the crop is cut it aspirates nutrients at the rate of 2% lost per day until it is sealed in the silo. Don't chop too fine and use a silage preservative, cost thirty cents per ton. Remember to do a "great" job of covering it after filling to minimize lost. Forget hay making and feeding; not needed.
19. Have well planned cattle facilities in order to maximize labor input: a one person parlor as an example.
20. Invest in buildings, equipment, quality animals and well trained motivated people who can meet the above pay back guidelines.
21. Have a goal of one cow and replacement per acre of cropland. Fertilize with manure and some bought nitrogen fertilizer to meet goals.
22. Get culling rate below 25% in order to maximize profits. Thirty per cent of culls should be done because of below average production.
23. Have a good record keeping system in order to be able to measure progress. Compare your achievements with the top ten per cent of dairymen. Remember if yours is just average you're working for minimum wages and not much profit.
24. Pick the low hanging fruit first where the greatest profit potential is.
25. Don't invest in land until you have the dairy system working. Buy land with cow profits. \$3000 land per acre at eight per cent interest equals \$240 per year for interest plus \$10 taxes, principal payment over twenty years at \$150 per year equals \$400 annual cost. For this you may have \$100 net cropping profit. You are short \$300 per year. Investing in a well designed dairy should buy a per cow cost of \$3500.
 - \$1200 heifer ready to freshen.
 - \$1000 six row free stall barn built for a twenty year life and then self destruct, its obsolete!
 - \$ 800 parlor facility with equipment for ten year life, then obsolete.
 - \$ 500 silo and etc.
 - \$3500
26. A 24,000 herd average should net at least \$700 per year per cow, not a short fall of \$300 per year in land investment.
27. Be willing to hire others to do what you are not good at. Be sure you know what you do well.
28. Take time off in order to recharge your optimism and enjoy life.

29. Select successful mentor dairymen and then copy them.

Get off dead center and move ahead with your plan. Nobody is going to do it for you. Take control of your destiny. Be happy and enjoy life. Your children will then want to be farmers too! Stay tuned for more info from the PA stake holders who are committed to profitable dairying with a future.

Notes
