
DAIRY NEWSLETTER

Increasing Profitability: Back to the basics

Our outlook on the Ontario dairy industry has shifted 180 degrees since the beginning of May. Not that long ago we could hardly keep up with the increases in quota. After 4 years of continual expansion, things were bursting at the seams.

Then came a quota cut in May and a further one in July, removal of all incentive days for the year and penalties for over shipping. The news didn't get any better during the fall; the everchanging USMCA trade agreement, rain and high toxin levels made things look even bleaker. With all this uncertainty many are likely thinking, how can I keep competitive? What can I do to increase my profitability?

Now that field work is finally(mostly) wrapped up, it is a good time to take a hard look at your management practices. How can they be improved so that each cow can perform to the best of her genetic ability? Cow comfort and transition cow management are far and away the biggest bang for your buck. However, rather than discuss what often times requires large capital investment, lets first focus on what could be called "low hanging fruit". Specifically, re-examining current practices and using this process as a fine-tuning exercise on management.

- 1) From an efficiency perspective, reviewing your records, protocols and standard operating procedures is an excellent starting point. This will give direction and validity to areas that warrant investment.
 - Begin by sitting down with your herd advisors, review your records and **Think Critically**
 - Think in terms of the life cycle of your cows.
 - Begin from birth of the calf and go all the way to when she is bred during her first lactation.
 - At each stage think of what her day looks like.
 - Where are the bottlenecks?
 - What problems persist year over year?
 - Why are we doing this protocol?
 - Are we seeing a benefit?
 - Have we changed something else that makes this procedure redundant?
 - Asking these questions first will help direct what protocols need to be made, corrected or perhaps eliminated.

- 2) After your team has come up with a list of management practices that will benefit your operation, a SOP should be made.
 - This is the who, what, where, when and how of the protocol and will ensure it is executed correctly.
 - Ask employees for feed back.
 - If something is unnecessarily difficult, chances are it will not get done.



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- Revising SOPs should take place annually with input from all members of the operation's team.

Of course, the first 2 steps are only beneficial if there are records to review.

- 3) Start monitoring and recording disease incidences. Even if you already record many on this list, consider if there any other areas you can measure.
 - Milk fever, retained placenta, ketosis, mastitis, respiratory (cows and calves) disease and calf scours are the basics each farm should be focused on.
 - Gathering this data allows your advisors and you to make informed decisions.
 - Your herd veterinarian will be able to help you set up a monitoring program including case definitions and other parameters.
- 4) Get the most out of every milk cheque
 - Maximize kilos of butterfat per cow.
 - Monitor your SNF ratio and adjust accordingly.
 - Sit down and make sure any feed additives you are using are a good ROI.
 - Our (Kirkton Bovine Services) partnership with Proventus (XL Vets) allows us access to services such as Farm Business Health check, Herd Bench Marking, as well as Human resource support and management.
 - Don't be afraid to ask our veterinarians the hard questions because we will find the answers!

In summary, taking a hard look at the weaknesses in your operation can direct where to invest and where cutting may be possible. Reviewing your existing data and protocols will allow a guided plan to effectively put programs in place that remove barriers to profitability. A sharp pencil, critical eye and consulting your advisors will find efficiencies on your farm.