

Strategies Involved in Monitoring and Refining Herd Health Programs

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ABOUT THE STUDY

The dairy industry is a constantly changing industry. Management practises evolve in response to new technology and regulations that help the industry achieve greater economic and environmental sustainability. Management strategies can also be classified as intensive or extensive systems. Extensive systems follow a low input/low output philosophy, whereas intensive systems follow a high input/high output philosophy. These philosophies, as well as available technologies, local regulations, and environmental conditions, manifest themselves in various approaches to nutrition, housing, health, reproduction, and waste management. The animals on most modern dairy farms are divided into different management units based on their age, nutritional needs, reproductive status, and milk production status. The milking herd, or group of lactating cows, is frequently managed intensively to ensure that their diet and environmental conditions are conducive to producing as much high quality milk as possible. The milking herd is further divided into milking strings on some farms, which are groups of animals with different nutritional needs. Dry cows are members of the adult herd who are not being milked and are in the process of resting before giving birth to their next calf. Heifers are female animals that have not yet given birth to their first calf.

Management of the herd

Housing systems: Depending on the climate, dairy size, and feeding strategies, dairy cattle housing systems vary greatly around the world. Housing must provide access to food, water, and protection from environmental hazards.

Temperature extremes are one issue for cattle housing. Heat stress can reduce cattle fertility and milk production. Providing shade is a common way to reduce heat stress. Barns may also include fans or tunnel ventilation as part of their architecture. While extreme cold is rarely fatal to cattle, it does increase maintenance energy requirements, resulting in increased feed intake and decreased milk production. Dairy cattle are frequently kept inside barns during the winter months, where their collective body heat keeps them warm.

Milking systems: The milking parlor is the center of activity on a dairy farm. Each lactating cow will be milked at least twice a day in the parlor. Milking parlors and milking machines require a tremendous amount of engineering.

Nutritional management: Feeding their cattle is by far one of the most expensive expenses for dairy producers, whether provided by the land they graze or crops grown or purchased. Pasture-based dairy producers devote a significant amount of time and effort to maintaining their pastures and thus providing feed for their cattle. Rotational grazing is a common pasture management technique used in dairy production. Many large dairies that deliver food to their cows have a dedicated nutritionist who is in charge of developing diets that consider animal health, milk production, and cost efficiency. Diets must be tailored to each animal's growth rate, milk production, and reproductive status in order to maximize productivity.

Reproductive management: Female calves born on a dairy farm are typically raised as replacement stock to replace older cows that are no longer productive enough. A dairy cow's life is a cycle of pregnancy and lactation that begins at puberty. The timing of these events is critical to the dairy's production capacity. A cow will not produce milk until she has had a calf. As a result, the timing of the first breeding, as well as all subsequent breeding, is critical for maintaining milk production levels.

Lactation management: Lactation begins after the birth of a calf. Lactation will typically last as long as the cow is milked, but production will gradually decline. Dairy farmers are intimately familiar with the milk production pattern and carefully time the next breeding of the cow to maximize milk production. The lactation cycle refers to the pattern of lactation and pregnancy. The cow is referred to as a fresh cow for the first 20 days after birth. During this phase, milk production rapidly increases, but milk composition differs significantly from the rest of the cycle. Colostrum, or first milk, is high in fats, protein, and maternal immune cells.