

Dollar Drain

Dollar Saving Tips for Texas Dairies

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Select Benchmarks Wisely

Much has been written about benchmarking in the dairy industry and what should be monitored on a regular basis. Common measures include: peak milk production, culling, and death loss. The challenge is to select monitors which trigger timely intervention.

For example, by the time a cow is culled for a disease it is too late to alter management and save her. The lag time between the onset of the real problem (disease) and the measure (culling numbers) is what makes monitoring cull rates reactive rather than proactive.

Step back and decide what exact questions need to be asked. Regular monitors should answer specific questions, be of economic impact, and be measurable.

Instead of tracking culling, monitor disease incidence on a regular basis to manage more proactively. Sudden outbreaks of displaced abomasums or severe diarrhea indicate a problem. Evaluate potential causes such as ration management and disease. If you wait for enough animals to leave the farm to affect the herd culling percentage, the problem may have corrected itself. However, many cows may have been culled when an earlier intervention could have prevented the loss of much of this group.

This is just one example of a common benchmark that could be more valuable with a different measure. Culling is the effect, when the real problem is disease (in this case displaced abomasums or diarrhea) and could be corrected much sooner with a different benchmark. Monitors are a great barometer to evaluate herd performance; however, they need to provide valuable feedback in a timely fashion to truly impact the bottomline.

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