



The Center Spotlight

www.centerfordairyexcellence.org ♦ Phone: 717-346-0849

Montgomery Co. Dairy Uses Team Approach to 'Fix the Problem'

Editor's Note: This is part of a monthly series of timely articles and information from the Center for Dairy Excellence, a non-profit organization focused on strengthening Pennsylvania's dairy industry.

HARRISBURG, Pa. — JC Hammond became the assistant herdsman at Spring Valley Dairy in January 2008, shortly after owner Shawn O'Rourke brought 150 cows into the new facility located in Barto, Montgomery County. Hammond took over as herdsman in April 2008.

After spending the first year getting the new herd adjusted to a new facility, Hammond and O'Rourke began noticing that things were not quite where they wanted them to be.

"Reproduction was our biggest issue," Hammond says. "It wasn't that we weren't breeding the cows, but they just weren't settling like we wanted them to. We had a problem, and we wanted to fix it."

Hammond began looking into the Center for Dairy Excellence's Target Profit Team program. "My opinion is that the more heads you have around and the more ideas you get, the better off a business is going to be," he says. "One person seeing the same thing day after day isn't going to notice the same things that a group of people collaborating together may see."

Hammond talked with Doug Speicher from Precision Diagnostics who helped him learn more about the target team program. In December 2008, Spring Valley established their target team with Speicher as the facilitator.

Focused on reaching a goal

Hammond says the team meets every month for about an hour. "Our veterinarian, nutritionist, AI technician and the Genex regional manager sit on the team, along with Shawn, Doug and me. We try to stay focused."

"When we started in December, our pregnancy rate averaged around 11 percent. In April, it was up to 12.5 percent," he says. "I am hoping it will go up

go up quite a bit in the coming months, and I don't think reaching our goal of 19 percent is that far off."

To reach that goal, the team recommended changes. "We started a pre-synch protocol. Before we were just doing ovy-synchs, and we noticed some results from that change," Hammond explains. "We also put a bull in with some of our problem cows. We don't have any data back from him yet, but I think once we do vet checks, we will see big changes in those cows."

"Lately we have been working on heat detection. We outsourced this function and have Genex watch the cows daily. [Our employees had so many other responsibilities] that it was difficult for them to devote 15 minutes a day to watching heat detections. They always had something else to do."

The team also recommended the farm do some testing to make sure there were no underlying factors, such as disease, preventing cows from getting settled. "The vet has done various tests, but we haven't found anything yet."

Center support made all the difference

Spring Valley Dairy has up to \$3,500 in funding from the Center for Dairy Excellence to use toward its target team efforts. The funding can cover the cost of paid team members and of discovery-related testing and analysis.

"Obviously right now with the low milk prices and last year's high feed costs, I can pretty much guarantee we would not be paying people to be on the target team without that funding," Hammond says. "We could not afford to pay for all those tests either, or to outsource our heat detections. We have to cut costs somewhere, and the target team is something that just would not have happened without the center's support."

"The \$3,500 we received will make or break our goal of reaching the 19 percent pregnancy rate."



Shawn O'Rourke and JC Hammond

Any dairy farm can initiate a team effort

Spring Valley Dairy is one of nearly 200 dairy farms in Pennsylvania that have benefited from initiating either a Dairy Profit Team, Target Profit Team or Succession Planning Team.

The Center for Dairy Excellence, in cooperation with Penn State Dairy Alliance, offers resources and training to help these farms organize their teams, identify a facilitator, plan meeting strategies and work toward their goals. The center also provides up to \$3,500 in support to any participating farm.

Discovery-related costs could include the cost of testing and analysis to discover identify the problem or a solution to address the bottleneck area and work toward the initiative. Farms also have access to Penn State's Profitability Assessment Dairy Tool (PA Dairy Tool) and the center's Practical Dairy Advisors, experienced dairy producers able to serve as mentors for other dairy operations.

The center continues to accept new farms into the profit team programs. Anyone interested should call 717-346-0849 or e-mail Cathy Bewley at cbewley@centerfordairyexcellence.org for additional information.

PA Dairies Show Strengthening Management In Challenging Times

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The saying that "Tighter Times Call for Tougher Measures" is not lost on Pennsylvania's dairy farms. The March Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard demonstrates how many herds have tightened up management to

make significant improvements in key herd performance areas over the past several months.

Somatic cell counts dropped more than 30,000, while the Average Days to First Service dropped to 90 days. The state's calculated milk per cow per day

increased this month to 62 pounds. The rolling herd average for herds on test was up nearly 50 pounds from a year ago, now at 21,013 pounds per cow. And the state's Average Days in Milk fell three days from a year ago.

Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard Summary	March 2008 Report	March 2009 Report	Change from last year	Target range
Milk Cows	549,000 cows	550,000 cows	+1,000	
Rolling 12-Mo. State Milk Production	10.690 bill. lbs.	10.541 bill. lbs.	-1.5%	10.8 bill. lbs.
Wholesale Milk Price	\$19.10/cwt.	\$11.72/cwt.	-38.6%	
PA Daily Feed Costs (cost of corn, soybean & hay at 65 lbs. milk)	\$5.48/cwt.	\$4.17/cwt.	-19.9%	
Milk Production/Cow/Day	62 lbs.	62 lbs.	No Chge.	80 lbs.
% of Herds with 80+ lbs./cow/day	17%	15%	-13.4%	
Rolling 12-mo. Herd Production Average	20,980 lbs.	21,013 lbs.	+0.2%	25,000 lbs.
Average Somatic Cell Count	290,000	269,000	+7.2%	200,000
% of Herds below 200,000 SCC	35%	38%	+10.8%	
Average Days In Milk	188 Days	185 Days	+0.9%	185 Days
Average Age to First Calving	25.6 months	25.5 months	+0.4%	21—24 mo.
Average Days to First Service	91 Days	90 Days	+1.1%	< 80 Days
Average Cull Rate (% left herd)	31.8%	33.3%		20—35%
Average Pregnancy Rate	18.36%	18.15%	-1.1%	> 20%
To view complete scorecard, visit:	www.centerfordairyexcellence.org			

"The numbers in this scorecard demonstrate how producers are really working to fine-tune their management," says John Frey, executive director of the Center for Dairy Excellence. "These changes will provide significant long-term benefits."

"They will be better prepared to weather this economic downturn, and they will be ready to benefit more from their improved profitability once the milk price cycle turns around," he says.

Frey encourages dairy farms to continue to look at every avenue to improve profitability. "The low milk prices will not last forever," he says. "The changes producers make today will help them build a stronger dairy operation to survive in the long term."

Complete Scorecard Online

To view the complete scorecard, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org. Click on the scorecard link at the bottom right hand of the home page. To find out more about resources to evaluate and fine-tune your dairy, call the Center for Dairy Excellence at 717-346-0849.

CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

