We are just finishing our new strategic plan here at the Institute and I thought I’d share a brief overview with you. A century after William Miner built Heart’s Delight Farm we feel that Miner Institute continues to embody his vision of agriculture and how application of science and technology can enhance agricultural productivity. Miner envisioned way back in 1923 that his model farm would evolve into an educational and research institution with, in his words, “instruction to be given in such subjects as dairying, animal husbandry, plant pathology, soils, and agricultural chemistry (and that) opportunities be given for experimental and research work in order that the school may serve to advance the science of agriculture.”

Over the years Miner Institute has developed a regional and increasingly national reputation for education, research, and demonstration programs in dairy, crop, equine, and agri-environmental management. Our 2011-2016 Strategic Plan will strengthen the Institute’s focus on crop, animal, and environmental management while adding to our mission the critical element of engaging the public and influencing policy on agricultural issues.

Strengthening our undergraduate education programs in agri-environmental science and dairy management over the next five years will be our top academic priority. We want our educational programs to be recognized for being hands-on and research-based, with a residential living and learning experience that complements the academic programs and prepares students to assume leadership roles in agriculture and environmental management.

The next five years will see us stand out uniquely, both regionally and nationally, as being willing and able to conduct high quality and integrated research spanning the forage crop-animal-environment interface that will have immediate application to the industry.
CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR BEFORE CALVING AND THE ROLE OF DYSTOCIA

For numerous reasons the transition period is one of the most stressful times a cow faces during her lactation cycle. This can be further complicated when the calving event itself is difficult. Therefore, the proper identification of both cows whose calving is imminent as well as those who may need assistance is critical. Two studies from researchers at the University of Edinburgh, University of Prince Edward Island, and Scottish Agriculture College published in Applied Animal Behaviour Science measured changes in behavior preceding calving and behavioral differences among unassisted cows, unassisted heifers, and assisted cows and heifers.

The initial study from this series measured the behavior of 20 multiparous cows (average parity = 3 with a range from 2 to 9 lactations) during the 24 hours before calving, relative to the behavior observed during a control period, which was the average behavior from 1 to 10 days before the calving period. The behaviors evaluated were posture (lying, standing, or walking), activity (eating, drinking, ground licking, grooming, or nothing), and tail raises (the raising of the tail from the body and held aloft). Several differences in behavior were evident between the calving and control periods. Cows increased the frequency that they changed from lying to standing (24 vs 16 bouts), were more active (529 vs 388 bouts of walking with a mean longer duration of each bout), and raised their tails more often (59 vs 19 times). There also was a small decrease (~ 1 h) in the mean lying time. Interestingly, feeding time did not differ between the two periods (102 vs 118 min). Finally, these researchers identified variables that could be used to indicate the approach of calving. A significant change in lying bouts occurred 4 h and 13 min before calving, which explained about 50% of the variation in the behavior. Similarly, a change in tail raising occurred 6 hours and 20 minutes before calving, which explained ~55% of the variation in behavior. Finally, the frequency that cows licked the ground changed significantly 3 hours and 19 min before calving with ~43% of the variation explained.

Following the documentation of the behavioral changes associated with normal calving, these researchers evaluated the differences between cows and heifers that calved in absence of assistance and those that required assistance. This study included 12 cows and 12 heifers, half of whom required the use of a calving jack for less than 1 minute to assist with the delivery of the calf. The same behaviors previously discussed were included in this study. However, the calving and control periods were only 12 hours. Overall, there were similar changes in behavior between the two periods. Lying bouts, tail raising (frequency and duration), and walking increased during the calving period. Using this definition of calving and control periods, feeding time decreased during the calving period. The greatest effect of dystocia occurring in this study was on the duration of the second stage of calving (defined as time from water breaking to the delivery of the calf), which lasted significantly longer for assisted cows and heifers. Additionally, heifers that did not need assistance spent more of the final 2 h before calving lying down. Conversely, there was no difference in lying duration observed in the unassisted cows or assisted cows and heifers.

These studies provide a framework that may be useful in developing a standard protocol to determine the cows and heifers for which calving is approaching. Key behaviors to focus on include tail posture, lying bouts, and ground licking. Unfortunately, there were limited behavioral changes that were useful in predicting which cows may need assistance with calving. The best take-home message from these data on assisting with calving is to let “sleeping” heifers be, as it appears that they are the most likely to calve naturally.


*Author’s note: This will be my last regular column in the Farm Report. I will soon be leaving Miner Institute, having completed my PhD, to seek greener pastures at the University of Tennessee as a Dairy Research and Extension Specialist. I hope you have enjoyed reading these columns as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

— Peter Krawczel
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VISION, Continued from Page 1

Our survey of Farm Report readership, as well as other surveys all confirm that this research will remain fundamentally important to the future success of the dairy industry, and we intend to redouble our efforts in the future even as many universities have had to scale back their applied research programs.

Over the next five years we want to focus on research that: 1) optimizes forage use and nutritional management of dairy cattle with a focus on productive, behavioral, metabolic, immune, and economic responses, 2) defines optimal social and physical environments for dairy cattle based on behavioral, productive, and health responses, and 3) evaluates the effect on soil and water quality of surface and sub-surface drainage, soil type, manure application, and cropping systems.

If we are successful, Miner Institute will be considered a premier source for technical information on agriculture and environmental issues by farmers, agribusiness, community leaders, and policy makers. In the next five years we have to use cutting-edge communication technology to expand the farmer and allied industry audience impacted by our demonstration and outreach programs. We must become more flexible in our delivery approaches, both regionally and nationally. Finally, and importantly, we must actively engage the farm and non-farm communities on the critical issues that cross-cut agriculture and society such as food safety, environment, and animal welfare. This will be a new role for us, but one we really can’t ignore in the future.

— Rick Grant, grant@whminer.com

CLOSE-UP PEN DESIGN & MANAGEMENT

Over the last several years the Food Animal Production Medicine group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has used its clinical experiences and research findings to make recommendations regarding transition cow housing and management to optimize health and performance. Nordlund, Cook, and Oetzel introduced the concept of a “social turmoil profile” of a close-up pen at the 2006 American Association of Bovine Practitioners meeting. The close-up pen houses dry cows for a relatively short time period, where there may be continuous social change if cows enter the pen approximately 3 to 4 weeks before calving and leave at calving. Typically there are increased physical (agonistic/competitive) interactions within the first 2 to 3 days of when new cows are added to a group. These interactions can affect feeding and resting behavior, which may have a lasting adverse effect on transition performance (i.e. intake, health, and milk yield). Therefore, many dairy producers try to minimize pen moves and social stress by maintaining a more stable pen with weekly instead of daily entries. We use the weekly entry approach at Miner Institute.

The “all-in, all-out” housing approach is gaining popularity as producers are building transition cow barns to accommodate multiple stable pens for 3 to 4 weeks before calving. These bedded pack pens require about 15% more roof space, but less concrete and stall construction costs than a traditional freestall close-up pen with a just-in-time-calving pen. The Dairyland Initiative website has blueprint guidelines to help design a facility and virtual tours of farms that have implemented socially stable groups of close-up cows. In addition to the floor plans, photos, and videos that are provided, the performance of the herds before and after implementation of new facilities is assessed by the Transition Cow Index (TCI).

Coonen and coworkers (2011) recently tested the hypothesis that housing close-up cows in a stable pen vs. a dynamic one with 2 entries per week would result in fewer feed bunk displacements which would improve intake, energy balance, and milk production. Surprisingly, housing strategy did not affect intake or plasma nonesterified fatty acid (NEFA) concentration during the close-up period or milk yield during the first 30 days in milk. At first look this research appeared to contradict the recommendations of the Food Animal Production Medicine group. However, the study indicated that when current recommendations for feed bunk space (30”/cow) and bedded pack space (≥ 100 ft²) are followed with small groups (≤ 10 cows) there was no advantage of stable housing. This is good news for producers who have smaller herd sizes or facilities that don’t allow multiple pens.

*References:  http://www.extension.org/pages/26040/five-steps-to-designing-the-ideal-transition-cow-barn
http://thedairylandinitiative.vetmed.wisc.edu/

— Heather Dann
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The 22nd Annual Nonpoint Source Pollution Conference was held on May 17-18 in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., organized by the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC) and its member states (CT, MA, NH, VT, ME, RI, and NY). The conference sessions were generally divided into two tracks: Stormwater Management and Watershed-Based Nonpoint Source Management. Surprisingly, agriculture was barely mentioned over the course of the two days. There were many topics discussed, including failing homeowner septic systems, lawn care practices and fertilizer usage, wastewater treatment, and non-pervious surface runoff and erosion associated with development. The conspicuous absence of agriculture’s contribution to non-point source pollution, or polluted runoff, could be interpreted in a number of ways but was certainly worth noting.

The main ag-related portion came on the second morning of the conference with the Agricultural and Rural NPS Tour, when we visited both the Welcome Stock Farm in nearby Schuylerville and the Saratoga Race Course. Welcome Stock Farm is a 900-head dairy with approximately 600 lactating Holstein cows. They have received funding through participation in NRCS cost-share programs as well as New York’s nonpoint source program that has helped them to implement several pollution reduction and manure management measures. These included a high flow/low flow silage leachate collection and vegetative treatment system, an outdoor cement walkway from the freestall barn to the milking parlor with curbing and a roof to keep the animal waste in and the clean water out, and a fence erected around a stream that runs through the farm to keep pastured cows out. They also maintain a riparian buffer around that same stream, which they only mow at certain times in order to provide suitable bird habitat.

The tour of the Saratoga Race Course dealt largely with their manure management practices. As an operation that houses horses year-round, with as many as 1800 onsite during peak season, they are subject to CAFO regulations just as a large dairy is. Interestingly, the New York Racing Association holds the CAFO permit, though they own neither the land nor the animals. Therefore, this requires cooperation between the trainers and NYRA as it is NYRA who is held responsible for maintaining compliance. The major focus in complying with their CAFO permit involves a tightly-controlled manure management plan where the manure is collected and stored in cement bays according to bedding type and then taken off site through contracts with local trucking companies. There were also graded cement pads with drains for cleaning the horses, which according to the facilities manager was the major issue they faced in controlling runoff onsite.

While there are many challenges to controlling the polluted water running off the land there are also many opportunities, and the advancements made in the agricultural sector provide a good example of this. It is clear that there are many contributors to the problem, and those who would point their finger solely at agriculture are ignoring its efforts and the vast scope of issues to be dealt with in order to collectively work towards a realistic and effective solution.

— Lisa Klaiber
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**CORNELL UNIVERSITY AGRONOMY FACT SHEETS**

Through its Nutrient Management Spear Program, Cornell University has almost 60 Agronomy Fact Sheets providing concise, up-to-date information on a wide variety of crop topics. The website: [http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/guidelines/factsheets.html](http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/guidelines/factsheets.html)

All of the fact sheets have been written in the past six years and are updated as new information becomes available. They’re in full color in pdf format, and can be downloaded using Adobe Reader. The free version of Adobe Reader can be downloaded with a link provided on the website, www.adobe.com. (If you don’t know how to do this, ask any teenager.) At the very least you should check out the Cornell website to see the topics included. New fact sheets are published frequently.
TOPDRESSING HAY CROPS WITH MANURE

Very wet spring conditions have made it almost impossible to spread manure in April and much of May, and some of what was spread would have been better remaining in the storage — that is, unless like many the storage was about to overflow. Last month some dairy manure was irrigated onto very wet and rolling open fields in the Champlain Valley, followed almost immediately by an inch or more of rain. We don’t like to think about the fate of that manure, even as we consider which is worse: Point or nonpoint pollution. One result of seemingly endless early spring rains is very full manure storages, and questions are being asked about where and how much manure can be applied to hay fields after first cut. Some suggestions and observations:

- The best candidates for manure topdress are grass fields and older alfalfa-grass stands that have at least 50% grass. Manure will really give these fields a boost, and in most cases should eliminate the need for topdressed fertilizer — a real money-saver.
- Don’t spread manure on spring seedings; allow the plants to become well established before rolling over them with manure spreaders. Manure applications during the corn rotation often build soil fertility, so the seeding may not need the added nutrients. Of course, check soil test results to be sure.
- There’s nothing wrong with applying manure to established alfalfa stands. The N in the manure won’t do much to help the alfalfa, but neither will it hurt it. Forget anything you may have heard about the N in manure “putting alfalfa’s nitrogen-fixing bacteria to sleep.” In fact, nitrogen will slightly increase alfalfa yield but not enough that we recommend using N fertilizer on established alfalfa (although that’s what they used to do in Hungary back in the 1980s when urea there was dirt-cheap).
- Rate: This depends on the solids content of the manure, but with typical 5 to 8% solids content, 4000 gallons/acre is fine and 6000 gallons probably won’t hurt the stand. The tractor and manure spreader tires will do more damage to alfalfa plants than will the manure, with most of this occurring in the following cutting. That’s because the tires squash the crown buds that will become the next crop.
- Timing: The sooner after harvest the better. That’s why Miner Institute bought a truck equipped with a tank spreader, so both forage harvest and manure application could be occurring at the same time. Research there found no difference in second cut alfalfa-grass yield or quality when manure was applied 0 vs. 3 days post-harvest, but there was a trend to lower yield when manure application was delayed by 7 days. The difference wasn’t huge, though, nor was it statistically significant so if you’re desperate to get manure applied don’t sweat the small stuff.
- Manure pathogens: This may be of concern if the manure is applied long after regrowth has started and the crop is harvested as dry hay. However, two years of research at Miner Institute on this topic found that a very high percentage of manure pathogens were killed when alfalfa-grass was manured several days after first cut, then second cut harvested and preserved as silage. Two Japanese studies found that M. paratuberculosis, the super-tough bacterium causing Johne’s disease, was killed by proper ensiling of alfalfa.

— Ev Thomas, thomas@whminer.com

MEASURING SUCCESS

Winston Churchill said that “Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.” If this is true I must be fabulously successful: For 45 years I’ve been telling farmers that they should start planting corn in early May, mow first cut alfalfa in late May, and harvest corn for silage when it’s at the proper stage of maturity. Each year, however, well into June and regardless of the weather, I see corn fields still unplanted and first cut alfalfa standing in the field. And I’m sure that this fall many farmers will harvest their corn by the calendar instead of at 33-35% DM, and soon nasty silage effluent will be pouring out of upright and bunker silos alike. Sometimes — as in 2011 — the reason for delayed fieldwork is disastrous weather conditions, but other times the disaster is the farmer him (or her) self. But next spring, “the good Lord willing and if the creek don’t rise,” I’ll be making the same recommendations to many of the same farmers.

But then there’s this sobering quotation from Albert Einstein: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Hmmm… cause for pause? Perhaps, but I won’t stop because on occasion some farmers actually do listen (!) and make the recommended changes. Either that or perhaps some cosmic force causes them to start planting on time and harvesting on time, just as I’ve been nagging them (yet again) about these very chores. Regardless of the reason, I take credit for these rare successes. Besides, giving advice to farmers is enjoyable – even if they don’t always follow it.

— E.T.
PLANTING CORN & MANAGING FIRST CUTTING IN AN EXTREMELY WET SPRING

The weather in the North Country and across much of the eastern half of the U.S. continues to be soggy making for very difficult planting conditions. Precipitation has been over 200% of normal amounts for much of the Northeast (see figure). In Chazy, rainfall for April (5.8 in) exceeded the 30-year average by 2.4 times and received twice the 30-year average rain for May (2.9 in).

With the wet weather comes no shortage of advice on how to best manage the mix of corn planting and first cutting that is underway. While all of this advice is not a bad thing, it’s important to determine the management changes that may or may not be needed on your farm. Many farms in Clinton County have 50% or less of their corn acres planted, while forage seedings are all but forgotten about for the time being.

One of the biggest concerns for both grain and silage production is when to switch to shorter season hybrids. The quick answer is if you planned to grow full season hybrids (≥105 day RM) this season and can’t plant until the first week of June, you should go with shorter day corn if possible. Though later planted corn tends to yield less and be of lower quality (largely from lower grain:stover ratio), it’s not always the case. Bill Cox at Cornell recently shared data from a previous three-year study (1988-1990) at two sites (Aurora and Mt. Pleasant, NY) that showed no difference in yield among short and full-season hybrids (85-110 RM) when planted on April 25, May 10, and May 25. Darby and Lauer (2002) also reported that silage yields were still 95% of maximum when planted in late May across sites in southern, central, and northern Wisconsin. These are exceptions though, and now that it’s May 31 and still wet, there’s a much greater risk for reductions in yield and quality. There’s also a greater risk of having difficulties with dry down for silage and grain depending on your choice of hybrid relative maturity and how this season’s weather plays out. Actual yield penalties will depend on soil conditions at planting and the distribution of heat units and moisture after planting. If fields aren’t planted by the end of May, Bill Cox recommends backing off silage hybrid relative maturity by 5 days and to scale back another 5 days as each week passes.

We have planted about 100 acres of corn (out of 291) at the Institute as of May 31. Grasses are headed and alfalfa is approaching a predicted NDF of 40%. While it’s easy to say ‘park the planter and start mowing,’ the very wet field conditions will make for slow drying and soil compaction is going to be a huge issue. The reality is that much of first cutting forage quality will be less than ideal. Even the best of management practices will fall short this spring and we’ll all have to play the hand Mother Nature deals as best we can. Hang in there.

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The Heart's Delight Farm Heritage Exhibit is now open for the 2011 season!

The Heart's Delight Farm Heritage Exhibit is now open for the 2011 season!

The exhibit is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Visit www.whminer.org to learn more.
Corn recently out of the ground in a no-till field. The later planting caused by the wet weather gives a tremendous advantage to perennial weeds, particularly in no-till fields.

Low areas in many fields remain saturated with water from the wet weather. Many of the low spots in corn fields will not be planted this year. The culmination of wet soils and later planted corn will likely reduce corn yields significantly this season.

Tall fescue is pictured with its seed head emerged. The extremely wet weather has caused fields to remain wet and unsuitable for tillage, planting, and first-cut hay harvest for much of the month of May. Grass fields will be harvested for heifer and dry cow forage since quality drops precipitously once the seed head emerges.
IT’S HARD TO OVERESTIMATE THE IMPACT OF FORAGE QUALITY

A dairy farmer called me on May 18 with a few questions and noted that he’d recently mowed and ensiled some grass and grass-clover extra-early, partly because he had a brief good weather window but mostly because he was just about out of haylage. He’d fertilized the fields with N, and while yields were low because of the early harvest, forage quality was eye-popping — over 20% CP and NDF in the 40s.

The low NDF confirms that these forages were harvested a bit too early, but don’t try telling that to his cows: He removed a bunch of grain, replacing it with an increased amount of grass silage, and his cows went up 5 pounds! I’m not nearly good enough with numbers to figure out the economics on that move, but 5 pounds of milk — nearly a dollar per cow per day — covers up a lot of “mistakes.” Also, the farmer was amazed at how fast the grass started to re-grow, though he wasn’t sure whether that was because he mowed it at a 2” to 4” stubble height, those short pieces of (by now very dead) first cut stems will fall to the ground. Little enough of the old stems will be harvested with the second cut that you’ll never pick up the difference in a forage analysis.

Grasses, however, are different: They have similar quality from leaf tip to the bottom of the above-ground portion of the plant. As grass matures, the whole plant declines in quality, so mowing forage grasses higher than about a 4” stubble height does little except reduce yield. Reminder: Don’t mow forage grasses lower than about 4” stubble height since some of the nutrients needed for the following crop are stored in the bottom few inches of the stems.

— E.T.

LATE HARVESTING OF FIRST-CUT FORAGES

Farmers may try to harvest forages on time, but breakdowns, weather and the Fickle Finger of Fate sometimes conspire to delay first cutting. What can be done to compensate for late harvest depends on the forage species. It may be useful to look at alfalfa, red clover and other forage legumes as you would a young tree: As the alfalfa plant (tree) matures, the stem (trunk) becomes woody, but the alfalfa leaflets (tree leaves) change little in form or quality. Just as the leaves on a 3-foot diameter tree are little different than those on a sapling, the leaflets on bud stage and full bloom alfalfa are of high quality — very low in fiber and over 30% crude protein.

By the time alfalfa reaches full bloom the bottom of the stem is highly lignified. Derived from the Latin word lignum meaning wood, lignin is almost completely indigestible by dairy cattle. (Charlie Sniffen and other ERNs—Eminent Ruminant Nutritionists—would most likely say that lignin is an insoluble heteropolysaccharide.) The forage quality of late-cut alfalfa and other legumes can be improved by increasing the mowing height by several inches. What happens to that high first cut stubble during second cut? Assuming a normal mowing height for second cut, which means leaving a 2” to 4” stubble, those short pieces of bud stage and full bloom alfalfa are of high quality — very low in fiber and over 30% crude protein.

— E.T.

Forage harvest recommendations are based on achieving the ideal combination of yield and quality, but for perennial forages stand longevity is also a factor. As long as grasses are harvested with sufficient stubble height they probably can be harvested at the vegetative (vs. boot) stage without sacrificing longevity. If corn reaches $8 per bushel and protein supplements remain very costly, and if milk remains in the $16-20 per cwt range, will it pay to harvest forage grasses in the vegetative stage? We may need to take a new look at an old topic.

— E.T.
Quickly, what comes to mind when you think of yogurt?

In honor of Dairy Month, Rachel Dutil and I decided to conduct a yogurt tasting survey, partly as a way to investigate the popularity of the new Greek-style yogurts. One producer of Greek yogurts, Chobani, out of New Berlin, NY, cannot manufacture product fast enough to keep grocery stores supplied. What makes these yogurts different? The Greek-style process removes more of the liquid whey from the yogurt, resulting in a thicker product with more concentrated protein. The combination of higher protein, thick creamy texture along with the low fat content is apparently what is driving increased consumer demand.

According to Businessinsider.com (March 2011 the-greek-yogurt-growth-story), Greek-style yogurt is one of the hottest-growing food categories, accounting for 19% of yogurt sales. Currently, the Northeast is the biggest market for Greek yogurts. This style yogurt is very popular but also more expensive than the traditional yogurts, ranging in price from $3.25 - 4.50/16oz compared to $1.60 for traditional yogurt. As demand for these yogurts rises, we wondered about the effect they might have on consumer preferences, especially non-yogurt eaters. Will Greek yogurt increase total consumption of dairy product? Will it perk non-yogurt eaters’ appetites, or at least tempt them into trying yogurt?

We decided to put this question to the test with our co-workers. We purchased a variety of yogurts from local (Burlington, VT-area) grocery markets, well-known varieties that varied in fat, sugar and protein content. We had participants fill out a survey form asking gender, age, like/dislike of yogurt, to score each product on a 1 (dislike) - 5 (like) points scale, vote for overall best yogurt, critique each product on taste and texture, and lastly asked if their yogurt consumption attitude had changed as a result of the tasting.

We chose six yogurts, all vanilla so as not to bias judgment based on flavor. We were looking for preference based on taste and texture of the yogurt, not the fruit. The table below lists the yogurts with their nutritional profile based on a 1-cup (227g) serving size, point total and number of votes for Best Overall.

We had a total of 20 participants, 18 that considered themselves yogurt eaters, with two brave non-yogurt eaters submitting to the tasting. Of our 20 participants, there were 9 male and 11 female, 13 in their 30s or 40s, 12 consume yogurt either daily or monthly, and two that did not like yogurt. Many ranked the traditional low-fat, low-protein styles as their favorites, but interestingly the highest fat yogurt was the highest ranked and voted best overall. Hmmm, nothing like creamy milk-fat to win a taste competition. Even the two non-yogurt eaters voted F as “okay,” but it did not change their attitude about yogurt. Yogurt E was noted to be “sour” by many, while yogurts A, B and C were noted to be “sweet.” However, this contrast may be more a result of tasting the lower sugar product immediately after the higher sugar products resulting in its lower score. Given the limited number of participants and small sample set of six products, we cannot draw decisive “research” conclusions about the popularity of Greek-style yogurt. So, the question remains whether these higher protein, low fat yogurts will continue to gain popularity or increase per capita consumption of dairy product.

For many of our respondents, yogurt symbolizes good nutrition and not simply a dieters’ food. I must say, from personal experience, Yogurt F, with the high milk-fat, has the greatest ability to satiate my hunger and “hold” my energy level for the day. I cannot say that about the low-fat, high sugar products. Whether you choose yogurt for health and nutrition, dieting or just a good food item, the Greek-style yogurts expand the range of options and really are good. If you like thick and creamy, try a Greek yogurt, you may be surprised.

Interesting tidbits while researching yogurt: Per capita consumption of yogurt by Americans is about 11 lbs, Canadians 23 lbs and Western Europeans 66 lbs. US consumption of yogurt is expected to double in the next few years. Hopefully, in addition to but not at the expense of other dairy products.

YOGURT…what came to mind of our survey participants…

“good stuff, granola, probiotic, healthy, nutritious snack, calcium.”

— Kurt Cotanch
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WHAT’S HAPPENING ON THE FARM

This will be my last Farm Report article as my internship has come to an end after a year and a half at Miner Institute. It has been a crazy journey! I first started in the dairy industry on my small family farm, taking care of the young stock, occasionally milking and of course showing my animals at the fair.

Then I started an internship at Miner Institute and my whole attitude changed. I began working with Anna Pape, the Herdsman, and Steve Couture, the Farm Manager, on day-to-day tasks around the Institute. I learned how to take care of fresh and sick cows, run vaccination programs, breeding programs and of course how to work alongside our research staff! I gained the ability to detect LDAS and RDAs, weak rumen contractions, administer IVs and draw blood to run for calcium levels. I have gained experience with many diseases and vaccinations as Miner Institute is very proactive about its vaccination programs. I also took over the breeding program by picking out the bulls used on the farm for the past year. I have learned there are many important aspects that go into being a profitable farm and it takes a devoted staff to reach goals that a farm sets for itself. The team at Miner Institute is amazing, they are dedicated to their assigned jobs but are not afraid to step up and help their colleagues.

The phrase "labor Management" has a whole new meaning after my time spent as an intern. You cannot learn enough about how to manage a team of people in college or from a book; first-hand experience is everything. This is the key to any farm or business and was the hardest concept for me to learn. In the end I hope I was thought of as more than just an intern but as a fellow team member. I have been able to observe, accomplish and participate in more than I had ever dreamed about and I now have enough experience to help manage my family farm. I wanted to thank everyone for allowing me this opportunity and for taking the time to work with me as I became familiar with how to work on a larger farm.

I will miss working with the cows and seeing all of the familiar faces around the farm! I also wish the new dairy intern, Laura Turek, good luck in her new position. Thank you.

— Jenna Russell

RETIREMENT

I’ve been retired for almost three years now, at least retirement a la Crop Dude. I still spend time on the Internet each morning dealing with email, the daily “Calvin and Hobbes” comic strip, e-newsletters and crop questions from farmers and others. There’s also the Farm Report to write and edit, farm magazine article deadlines, and meetings to prepare for. All in all, retirement is a pretty neat gig:

• As long as I only wear one color (white) and brand (Hanes), mating socks is simple. If I wear a hole in one I have to throw out only that sock, not its hole-less mate. Colored socks are only for special occasions.

• Several items of apparel I may never again need to buy: Ties, sport coats, dress slacks. We went to a wedding last month and I had wear a sport coat and tie (and colored socks, this being one of those aforementioned “special occasions”). Rats; I was shooting for a whole year without wearing a tie — came close, though.

• The best thing about retirement is that I get to spend almost every day with The Bride. I’m usually up by 6 a.m. year-round, an hour T.B. considers to still be the dead of night, so the last time she fixed breakfast for me was during the Carter Administration. But even with her getting up somewhat later that leaves us 15 hours each day. And in spite of the old saying that familiarity breeds contempt, so far she isn’t referring to me as her “first husband.”

• Speaking of T.B., she will soon be 65 and just received her Medicare card, including this recommendation: “Carry your card with you when you are away from home.” The Social Security website, on the topic of identity theft, states: “DO NOT routinely carry your (Social Security) card or other documents that display your number.” Can you guess what a person’s Medicare ID number is? Why, it’s the same as his/her Social Security number, which is printed right on the front of the Medicare card! (Sigh.)

— E.T.

DAIRY COW NUMBERS

In 2010 about 45% of dairy cows in the U.S. were on farms with over 1000 cows, a continuation of a decades-long trend to larger dairy farms that shows no sign of changing. It’s expected that by next year the figure will be 50%, and in 10 years a full two-thirds of U.S. dairy cows will be on 1000+ cow farms. Farms with fewer than 100 dairy cows currently represent 15% of total dairy cow numbers; expect this number to be reduced by half in 10 years. The reason, of course, is the increased efficiencies possible with large dairies. The cropland on many smaller dairy farms is being gobbled up by their expanding neighboring farms, often when the current generation decides to sell because there’s nobody coming on to run the business. This doesn’t mean that small farms cannot remain competitive; they have the advantage of a smaller hired labor force and therefore less of what large farms identify as one of their biggest challenges.
POOR FORAGE QUALITY VS. TOXIC FORAGE: DON'T MAKE A BAD SITUATION WORSE

It has been and continues to be a miserable crop year. How best to manage planting and harvest of 1st cut? The question is no longer whether to plant or mow, but rather when will it stop. Do whatever you can that suits your farming circumstances. Some thoughts to consider, but my overriding thought is to not make a bad situation worse. Nutritionally, we can deal with low forage quality and still make milk, but we cannot make milk with toxic forage.

1. If you are out of feed, cut haylage and get what you can, not much available for purchase.

2. When field conditions allow my leaning is toward planting corn, which still has a chance at being a quality feed, especially given the corn grain market. Not sure it is worth waiting on corn planting to harvest haylage at 60% NDF rather than 65%. If you can harvest a significant amount of quality, <55% NDF grass or <45% NDF Alfalfa haycrop, then get it.

3. If you choose to mow consider this:
   a. Is there sufficient feed/hares to harvest a decent amount of forage or will you be stopping and starting, resulting in possible spoilage layers in the pile/bunk?
   b. Mow what you can chop and pack before the next rain. Minimize your risk of rain-soaked windrows resulting in mulch-quality forage.
   c. Minimize soil contamination: Increase stubble height to 4” at least to minimize soil and maximize drying. Also raise rake, merger and chopper pick up reel heights. Soil contamination will increase ash and dirt, hinder fermentation and possibly result in clostridial fermentations and the resulting toxic biogenic amines and high butyric acid levels.
   d. If fields have been flooded and laden with trash and silt, possibly wait for a “cleansing” rain to wash some of the debris off the forage.

4. Inoculant or acid?
   a. Late maturity forage tends to be low in the sugars that fuel fermentation. Some recommend acids, propionic acid especially, to preserve forage and minimize clostridial fermentations.

5. Regardless of preservative, follow good harvest and preservation practices of proper DM level (>30% but <40%), 0.75” chop length and silage density (>45 lb/cu.ft. as-fed basis)

We can still make milk with high NDF, low protein forage. Wet slop, too dry, too long, soil and toxin contaminated feed is a real disaster that we can still avoid.

— Kurt Cotanch cotanch@whminer.com

MUSEUM DAY 2011

The fourth annual Press Republican Museum Day was held Saturday, June 4. More than 20 Clinton County museums, wineries, and art galleries participated. The Heart's Delight Farm Heritage Exhibit was a participant for the first time and had around 100 visitors.
Closing Comment
One reason to smile: Every minute of every day someone pulls a hamstring in an aerobics class.

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