A positive dining experience allows the cow to satisfy her behavioral needs for eating, resting, and rumination. And a satisfied cow will be productive, efficient, and healthy. The best feeding environments feature a well-formulated and palatable ration, feed availability when the cow wants to eat, sufficient bunk space to ensure that competition doesn’t limit access to feed, feed barrier design that encourages natural feeding behavior, good water availability, no restrictions on resting activity (which will reduce feeding time), and good flooring, air quality and ventilation.

The list goes on, but it is clear that feed availability should never be limiting – the diner needs to be open 24/7.

How important is feed availability? Well, we know that a cow’s motivation to eat increases markedly after only 3 hours of feed restriction. Nebraska research found that a functionally empty bunk from midnight to 6:00 am reduced milk by nearly 8 lb/cow and also reduced lying and feeding time. Canadian research showed that restricting access to feed by 10 hours/day reduced dry matter intake 3.5 lb/cow and caused twice as many displacements at feeding. A study with 47 dairy herds with similar genetics that were fed the fed the same diet found that milk yield among dairy farms ranged between 45 and 74 lb/day. This range reflected the management level of the farms – and ensuring feed availability explained a large amount of the variation in milk production among the farms. Herds that fed for refusals averaged almost 4 lb/day more milk and those herds that practiced routine feed push-ups averaged over 8 lb/day more milk.

We also know that overcrowding the feed bunk drastically alters normal feeding behavior, causing cows to eat fewer meals at a faster rate and potentially compromise healthy rumen function. We also know that, given a choice, subordinate cows will overwhelmingly choose to eat a lower palatability feed alone rather than compete with a dominant cow for more palatable feed when bunk space is 18 inches/cow or less. But even with 30 inches/cow, about 40% of subordinate cows still choose to avoid the dominant cow even when it means eating a less desirable feed. Going forward, this is a major challenge for proper feeding management and design of our feeding environments. How will we accommodate the dining needs of individual cows in a group setting?

Another common feeding management
The management of reproduction on dairy farms has drastically changed since the introduction of synchronization protocols in the mid-1990s. Now another force is taking hold in reproductive management: automated estrus detection technologies. The most commonly marketed of these automated technologies are leg or neck mounted activity monitors. Other technologies with potential for estrus detection include those that monitor rumination, feeding time, animal position, progesterone, and even temperature. Now that multiple, successful methods are available for improving reproductive performance, the questions becomes which one works best? During the last couple of years this has become a popular topic in research.

In 2010 an Israeli study compared the reproductive performance of automated activity monitoring and synchronization and found no difference in conception rate between the two reproductive management systems. In a similar, larger study conducted by the University of Guelph, the same comparison was made on three commercial herds. Throughout the study cows using either type of reproductive management could also be bred after visual observation of heat. Using this strategy there was no difference between automated activity monitoring and synchronization on herd pregnancy rate or days open. However, when the study didn’t include those cows bred after visual observation of heat, the automated activity monitored cows had 41 fewer days open than the synchronized cows. This was likely due to a shorter service interval in automated activity monitored cows, compared to synchronized cows that were bred at a predetermined time.

Another research focus has been to explore the combination of synchronization and automated estrus detection. In a 2014 study Kansas State University and Select Sires compared cows bred to a Presynch-Ovsynch protocol with cows bred using automated activity monitoring, followed by prostaglandin intervention at 54 DIM if not yet bred, and a CIDR and Ovsynch protocol if still not inseminated by 75 DIM. Days open of cows in the automated activity monitoring with intervention group were, on average, 24 days shorter.

University of Wisconsin researchers also compared the combination of automated activity monitoring and synchronization with strict Presynch-Ovsynch timed artificial insemination, looking specifically at first service. Cows were split into three treatments: 1) cows were inseminated based on increased activity, but received Ovsynch if not bred by 65 days in milk; 2) cows received a Presynch-Ovsynch protocol and were bred based on increased activity throughout the synchronization protocol, up until timed breeding; 3) cows received a Presynch-Ovsynch protocol and completed the synchronization and timed insemination regardless of activity level. Results showed that combining automated activity monitoring and synchronization protocols reduced time to first service, but also reduced first service conception rate as compared to Presynch-Ovsynch alone.

These studies provide evidence that both automated estrus detection and synchronization can be successful, and that the combination of the two systems may also be effective. As we move forward in our search for the ideal reproductive management strategy, it’s important that we consider not only which one produces the best results, but also the economic feasibility and consumer perception of each system.

— Karmella Dolecheck

Karmella Dolecheck was a Summer Experience in Farm Management Intern in 2011. She recently completed her MS at the University of Kentucky, focusing on reproductive management. She is continuing at the University of Kentucky for her Ph.D., focusing on dairy farm economics and decision support systems.
GUILTY WITHOUT A TRIAL: ONE ABUSE VIDEO HURTS ALL DAIRY FARMS

There are over 60,000 dairy farms in the U.S. that house over 8 million dairy cows and an equal number of dairy heifers. Anybody who has worked with dairy cows knows that patience is key to success, and absolutely nothing is gained when an animal is mistreated. However, there can be bad eggs in any basket. Animal rights organizations, whose ultimate agenda is to end animal agriculture completely, have taken the abnormal and portrayed it as normal, claiming that all farm animals are mistreated. Obviously that is not the case — undercover animal rights activists spend months on several farms to collect seconds worth of video. More often than not, the footage doesn’t depict abuse at all, and instead shows breeders inseminating a cow in heat or workers picking up a cow who has fallen down. However, every once in a while an animal rights extremist is in a bad place at the right time and witnesses abuse. The footage is portrayed with darkened images and disturbing sound effects on national media and instantly all 60,000 dairy farms are found guilty without a trial.

Consumer education continues to improve the public’s perception of animal agriculture. We may have arrived late to the party, but the social media presence of the agricultural community is unwavering. The Peterson Farm Brothers produce musical satires with an ‘agvocacy’ twist, to the tune of 30 million YouTube video views. For comparison, the last three Mercy for Animals videos combined racked up just over 700,000 views. The winds may be in the farmer’s favor, but that’s still 700,000 more negative impressions than would be ideal. Consumers will never fully trust in agriculture when an animal rights campaign pulls at their heartstrings on national television every few months. Even though the cases are few and far between, animal agriculture needs to implement a zero tolerance policy for animal cruelty.

The first animal cruelty laws were passed in 1641 in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Today all 50 states have anti-cruelty statutes, but in the majority of states animal abuse is only a misdemeanor. If perpetrators were more severely punished for their actions, perhaps they would think twice before taking their temper out on a stubborn heifer. Social science research shows that children who witness or experience abuse are more likely to abuse animals in adulthood. Males are four times more likely to report abusing animals compared with females. When parents recognize but ignore a child who mistreats animals, the child is more likely to abuse animals during adulthood. Empirical evidence supports that teenage boys engage in animal cruelty in the presence of their peers to enforce their masculinity.

In the context of a dairy farm, it’s more important than ever for managers and owners to set an example of good animal handling. If an employee is seen mistreating an animal, even just one time, it’s critical for the employee’s superior to discuss the unacceptable behavior. But how do we prevent the owners or managers from mistreating animals? Perhaps the industry needs a “hotline” to report animal cruelty, or a designated staff member on every farm that can be alerted of the abuse in a confidential way.

A nationally representative survey published in 2009 estimated that 1.8% of adults in the U.S. have mistreated an animal at least once. It’s not clear whether the same prevalence exists in the dairy sector workforce. However, until the prevalence of abuse is zero, anti-agricultural organizations will continue to make all farms responsible for the actions of a few people. Through social media, farm tours, and good communication, the dairy industry has done a fantastic job of educating the public about the benefits of progressive agriculture. Cow comfort research and animal welfare guidelines have drastically improved modern animal housing systems. However, all this may be for nothing if the actions of the industry’s bad eggs are not corrected. Despite the fact the most farms treat their animals with care and compassion, we need to work within the dairy industry to identify and prevent any incidence of animal abuse. The best way to do this is still unclear, but one thing is known for sure: when animal cruelty occurs on a farm, it is inexcusable, and it reflects poorly on all dairy farmers across the country.

—Melissa Woolpert
woolpert@whminer.com

Learn more about Miner Institute, visit www.whminer.org
“Anything you can do I can do better, I can do anything better than you.” The lyric is from the 1950 musical comedy “Annie Get Your Gun” but could have been written today by the ad writers for any of a number of crop supply companies including seeds, farm chemicals and inoculants. Or perhaps the Olympic Games motto “Citius, altius, fortius” — faster, higher, stronger. Superlatives abound in the advertisements, but what are farmers to make of them?

Quite a lot, actually, but only if you ask the right questions. The yield and quality of corn hybrids has been increasing for many years, so the newest corn hybrids are likely to be better than most of the hybrids that have been on the market for a few years. Most, but not all. Determining which hybrids are better will require some digging, either by looking at university corn hybrid trials or working closely with your seed dealer(s). As has been previously discussed, Cornell University doesn’t have any 2014 data on corn hybrids for silage, and may not for the foreseeable future. However, both the University of Vermont (we think) and Penn State University (we know) either have or will soon have corn silage hybrid performance data. You’ll soon discover that most of the hybrids listed in seed corn catalogs aren’t included in these trials, not surprising considering that among the many seed companies selling in a region there are literally hundreds of hybrids available. But all is not lost since the seed companies are continually testing their new and experimental hybrids against current ones — both theirs and the competition’s. If a seed dealer claims that Silobuster 240 is better than anything the competition has to offer, that’s the time to pop the question: “Where’s your data?” But if he says that Silobuster 240 is better than Silobuster 220 that his company also has been selling, that it has an advantage in yield, quality, etc. — there’s a pretty good chance it indeed is better. That’s why it’s important to deal with reputable dealers — and most are.

Similarly, if a company has a silage inoculant claiming to increase digestibility or the rate of fermentation, or that it will reduce silage losses more than another product, ask for proof. And if a product costs more than the one you’re currently using, the company rep needs to prove (or otherwise convince you) that the more expensive product is worth the extra cost. This sounds simple but given some of the crazy things farmers have purchased over the years — only long afterwards asking my opinion on the matter — it must not be simple at all.

— Ev Thomas
ethomas@oakpointny.com

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**2015 MILK PRICES**

- The record high milk prices dairy farmers have been enjoying in 2014 will be but a distant memory in 2015. You’ve already had a harbinger of this via the slump in milk prices during recent weeks. The forecast is for U.S. “All-Milk” prices to drop below $20 in January — and then keep on falling to $18 or perhaps a bit less by midsummer before recovering by a buck or so. Lots of things can happen — weather only one of them — to change this outlook for better or worse, and low grain prices will temper the financial impact of the price drop. However, there’s a lot more to dairy profitability than the often-mentioned milk-feed price ratio. While it may not be time to “batten down the hatches” the coming year will be a good one to pay attention to cost control, including:

- Traits are great, but don’t spend money for corn hybrid traits you don’t need.
- Even with low grain prices this may be a good time to consider a high-forage ration, but only if you have plenty of high quality forages.
- Take advantage of high soil fertility built up through manure applications, or fertilizer applications that were more than needed.
- Do you really need that new tractor/corn planter/chopper/etc.? Fine if it will do something that your current equipment won’t do, and will result in higher yield and/or lower costs. But just to “trade paint’’?

— E.T.
REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS –
A FEW MORE PIECES FOR THE PUZZLE

After attending this year’s Joint Annual Meeting for the American Dairy Science Association, American Society of Animal Science and Canadian Society of Animal Science in Kansas City, I asked all of our Miner staff who attended to share something they learned at our weekly research staff meeting. For me, I learned that a 50+-year-old mother of three should probably never ride a mechanical bull or pig…lesson learned. Actually, I attended an interesting symposium discussing Reproductive Success in Ruminants: A Complex Interaction Between Endocrine, Metabolic and Environmental Factors. It was not only refreshing to be able to listen to a discussion that didn’t involve fiber (no offense to you pef junkies), but the title itself was encouraging…Reproductive Success in Ruminants. Cool.

In 2010, I wrote a Farm Report article that asked the question, Does High Milk Production Decrease Fertility? I’ve always believed that high production and decreased fertility don’t go hand-in-hand…with some of the highest producing herds having the highest conception rates. But what sets some herds apart from others? Is it nutrition? Is it management?

Dr. Iain Clarke from Monash University in Australia, helped provide some pieces to the puzzle when he reviewed recent advances in our understanding of the hypothalamic control of reproduction. As with all of the body’s functions, the brain, specifically the hypothalamus and pituitary, drives the reproductive process. Dr. Clarke discussed a couple of hormones I didn’t know much about: kisspeptin (KP) and gonadotropic inhibitory hormone (GnIH). KP may function to integrate energy balance, metabolism, and the endocrinology of reproduction. While KP is viewed as a stimulator of gonadotropic releasing hormone (GnRH – the hormone responsible for release of follicle stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone from the pituitary gland), GnIH has the opposite effect.

Some recent work with sheep have found that GnIH inhibits reproductive behavior expression and is regulated by melatonin and stress. We’ve always had a hunch that reproduction can be impaired by stress (heat stress, overcrowding, etc.) but now we have a possible mechanism for how reproductive behavior and physiology are being influenced by stress-related hormones.

Without getting any deeper into reproductive endocrinology, (sigh of relief from the Farm Report readership) the bottom line is that the underpinning to reproductive success is nutrition and cow comfort. Fortunately for us at Miner Institute, that is the type of research we do best. While more work in this area needs to be done, any improvements in cow comfort on your farm are not only going to improve animal productivity but also her reproductive performance as well.

— Katie Ballard
ballard@whminer.com

FEED, Continued from Page 1

problem is non-uniform feed delivery or feed quality along the length of the bunk. When the feed is inconsistent, cows will “graze” up and down the bunk, resulting in greater competitive interactions as they jockey for feed access. A recent study from British Columbia found 51% more switches in feeding location and 3.5 times more competition under these conditions – certainly not conducive to focused, efficient feeding.

Cows naturally have an aggressive feeding drive and will exert sufficient force against the feed barrier to injure themselves while reaching for feed. If we consistently make cows reach for feed, we are likely frustrating their natural drive to eat and unwittingly training them to become less aggressive eaters! Feed needs to be pushed up as cows gradually push feed away from themselves during the meal. We know that the first one to two hours after feed delivery is the most competitive time for a cow, so maybe we need to focus on this crucial time period when pushing up feed. In fact, an Arizona study found that when feed was pushed up each half-hour for the first two hours after feeding, versus only once per hour, cows produced 4 lb/d more milk and were 10% more efficient.

So, the perfect dining experience boils down to ensuring that the cows can eat when they want, competition is minimal, and they can comfortably lie down afterward. When this happens, the cow will be productive and healthy and the diner will be profitable!

— Rick Grant
grant@whminer.com
WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE FARM

As winter rolls in, milk production is in the low-mid 90s, the herd is averaging 156 DIM, 49% of the cows are pregnant and we are shipping 6.8-6.9 lbs of components per cow per day. However, the calving report for October and November is discouraging; it has been the highest DOA rate of the year to date - large calves (heifer calves averaged 10 lbs heavier in October than in September), a couple older, over-conditioned heifers had difficulty calving and a couple of wrong presentations in calving delayed delivery.

Crops are harvested and manure is the only thing being trucked these days, but it’s still really busy at the farm. We have 3 intensive cow trials going on right now — small pens of cows, lots of gates, many different loads of feed and a lot of trips between the barn and the parlor. The research lab has been buzzing with activity as the research staff collects samples around the clock — rumen fluid, urine, blood. One of our breeders thought he was going crazy, hearing voices in the barn but seeing no one around — he laughed when he realized it was just two people on the observation deck recording cow behavior for the 72-hour cow-watch.

On November 12 we started feeding our bunk of 2014 corn silage. Although we still have 2013 corn silage it became necessary to switch the main herd onto the new crop corn silage to conserve the remaining 2013 silage to finish out one of these cow trials. It’s not ideal to start feeding this year’s corn so early; the bunk has only been covered for 6-7 weeks. Several samples and a ration adjustment, and the cows continue to milk.

It’s always great to see former Miner Institute students and interns and hear about their work in the dairy industry. A couple weeks ago Brittany Sweeney came back as one of the speakers at the Cornell Feed Dealer’s Meeting. Brittany was a student in our Advanced Dairy Management semester and then a year-long research intern after she graduated in 2011. Currently Brittany is working on her Ph.D. at Cornell in transition cow nutrition and health. It was great to have her back (this time behind the podium) to share some of her research. She gave us a refresher course on calcium in the dairy cow, especially its importance in the proper functioning of the immune system. Calcium in fresh cows has gotten a lot of attention recently and rightly so — it plays a vital role in many functions in the cow especially during calving and the transition into lactation. We visually recognize the clinical signs of low blood calcium (hypocalcemia/milk fever) and can treat the cow appropriately but subclinical hypocalcemia can only be diagnosed by measuring the calcium level in the blood. Brittany explained some of the current research on the negative impact of even subclinical hypocalcemia to a cow’s health, production and reproduction. She shared with us her work comparing different tools for measuring blood calcium, testing out a method that could be feasible for on-farm use.

I was especially interested in her presentation because at the farm we have continued to monitor blood calcium levels in our fresh cows, using the IDEXX VetTest. We are taking blood samples 5-20 hours after calving. However, some of the cutpoints for determining subclinical hypocalcemia in the literature are established based on blood samples taken in the first several days or the first week after freshening. I’m interested to know if research has been done on the normal calcium level in the first several hours after calving and in the first 24 hours. How low is too low (negative impact on cow health and production) at 5, 10, 15 hours post calving? This is a winter reading project for me!

— Anna Pape
pape@whminer.com
TONGUE TWISTERS

As you walk through the barn it’s hard not to be entertained by various facial expressions made by the cows. Some blink with surprise as if they were not expecting you to walk by, a few may extend their nose to get a good whiff, several are sure to be completely oblivious and then there’s THAT one. That cow standing there twirling, twisting, and swirling her tongue, which now looks like a fish out of water. After the initial laugh about how ridiculous she looks, you have probably tried to come up with why she is behaving that way. It turns out that there are valid reasons behind why this cow is twirling her tongue.

A stereotypy is a movement that is repeated regularly without any obvious function. Tongue-rolling is the most common stereotypy in cattle of all ages. It’s defined as when the animal repeatedly and continually rolls its tongue in and out of the open mouth with its head extended and sometimes bobbing up and down. Time engaged in such stereotypies has been shown to increase as a response to restrictive feeding, decreased eating duration, boredom, or anxiety. An Italian study showed that tongue playing behaviors were higher in cows housed in a tie stall prior to grazing and then decreased during and after grazing. This suggests that cows housed indoors are more likely to express tongue twirling habits than cows that go out on pasture. In addition to housing environment, it is interesting to think about other causes of this comical behavior, like whether a cow can develop oral stereotypies as calves or even if cows can learn tongue twirling from other cows.

The particular cow that inspired this piece was 1994, who is the tongue twirler of pen 31. She is one of 30-something cows in the pen, all of which are fed from Calan bins. I also remember observing similar behavior over the summer when a cow housed in the tie stall would incessantly roll her tongue for a majority of the day. Another cow who is currently housed in the tie stall, demonstrates another bizarre oral behavior, repeatedly dunking her nose into her water bowl and then rubbing her mouth along the edge as water dribbles down into her feed bunk. This created such a mess that we had to secure a plastic tub under her water bowl to catch the drippings!

So why do some of Miner Institute’s cows have oral stereotypies? I’ve been told that tongue twirling is quite common in Jersey cattle and that the Institute had quite a few tongue rollers when half of the herd was Jersey. Perhaps Jerseys just get bored more easily or they have more anxiety. As far as explanations for this in our Holsteins, it’s not due to feed restriction because cows here are fed ad lib. It is possible that this behavior develops as calves, which are fed only 2x a day, and then carries into adulthood.

While these behaviors are harmless, they can indicate that the animal has anxiety or is just bored. Such oral stereotypies may also be a stress reducing behavior, similar to cribbing in horses, which increases endorphin release. The release of these “feel good” chemicals can be addictive, which is likely why animals with oral stereotypies spend significant amounts of time doing these behaviors. Fortunately, there are only a few cows that exhibit this behavior and if that makes their day more enjoyable then….let the tongues twirl!

— Alyssa Couse
couse@whminer.com

*References available upon request.

NOBODY ASKED MY OPINION, BUT…

- The first protective cup was used in hockey in 1874 and the first helmet in 1974, suggesting that it took 100 years for men to realize that their brain is also important.
- In looking at the cerebral (and inkless) World Cup champion German national team, someone suggested that the ink in tattoos must leach into the blood and destroy brain cells. The more tats, the more brain cells destroyed.
- Chocolate is a vegetable. It’s derived from cacao beans, and beans are vegetables. Sugar is derived from either sugar cane or sugar beets, and both are plants, placing them in the vegetable category. Therefore, chocolate is a vegetable.
WATER FOOTPRINT OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY

Miner Institute staff are observing cows in overstocked pens for 3 days to watch for effects on behavior and time budget. If you have never been involved in a ‘cow watch’ before, it is exactly as it sounds, watching cow behavior over a long period of time. There is down time between watching cows which allows for plenty of time to observe other activities in the barn.

While I sat watching cow behavior, I could see water spilling onto the concrete floor from a waterer in one pen. A float had broken in the waterer, resulting in constant water flow. Since we did not have the supplies on hand to fix the waterer, we simply reduced the flow rate so that it would fill more slowly and therefore limit the amount of overflowing water, and was fixed quickly by dairy barn staff. I estimated that 2 gallons of water were overflowing per minute. During the 3 day cow watch, 8,640 gallons of water had spilled from the waterer. Thankfully, all of the other waterers were working properly. The large loss of water from this one waterer had me thinking about the water footprint of the dairy industry.

To put it another way, how much fresh water does it take to make one gallon of milk.

It may sound strange to talk about the water footprint of the dairy industry in the North Country after such a wet spring and autumn. However, there is strong interest from the food processing and beverage industry in measuring and reducing the water footprint of the dairy production industry. The Dairy Research Institute estimates that 144 gallons of water is required to produce 1 gallon of milk and that the dairy industry accounts for 5.1% of total water withdrawal. However, they also noted that the water footprint is a local issue that can be strongly influenced by average rainfall and irrigation practices. A total of 97% of the water footprint of the dairy industry is on-farm, primarily for crop production and drinking water for cows (93.5% alone is required for production of feed for dairy cattle). Since farms make up by far the largest percentage of water usage, they can have the largest impact on reducing the water footprint. There are some small changes that can be made on the farm that can have a large impact on reducing the water footprint. Some examples specific to dairy operation include revised cleaning procedures, waterer and cow sprinkler maintenance, and implementation of best management practices to maximize milk production per cow.

The Dairy Research Institute suggests that water used to clean milking parlors can, and often is, reused to clean production areas and then to irrigate fields and that water used in heat exchangers to cool milk can be recycled back as drinking water for cows. These are excellent examples of ways to reduce the water footprint. Additionally, employees should be properly trained to clean the milking parlor and holding areas efficiently and with as minimal water usage as possible. Of course, waterers for cows and sprinkler systems for cooling cows should be maintained and any leaks should be patched. And finally, improving milk production or feed efficiency will improve the water footprint since the amount of water consumed by cows to support the increase in milk synthesis will increase minimally compared to all other water inputs. Combined, these changes can have a big impact on the water footprint on farms. When it comes to reducing our water footprint, every little bit helps.

— Shane Fredin
fredin@whminer.com

2015 Herd Health and Nutrition Conferences

March 17 at the Holiday Inn in Liverpool, NY
March 19 at the Essex Resort and Spa in Essex Junction, VT.

These conferences are presented through a partnership between PRO-DAIRY and Northeast Ag and Feed Alliance (NEAFA). An ideal educational opportunity for agriservice professionals, feed industry representatives, veterinarians, and dairy producers alike.

Topics for the 2015 Conferences include:
• Starch Availability, Measurement, and Implications for Ration Formulation - Dr. Mike Allen, Michigan State University
• Fiber Digestion: New Concepts to Improve Feeding of Higher Forage Diets - Dr. Mike Van Amburgh, Cornell University
  • Heat Stress and Gut Function - Dr. Lance Baumgard, Iowa State University
• Fatty Acid Nutrition and Milk Fat Depression - Dr. Kevin Harvatine, Pennsylvania State University
WHAT IF ...

December is one of my favorite times of year. The field work is done and we can be thankful for the bountiful harvest. The holiday season is in full swing and we make time to gather with friends and family. We reflect on the past year and excitedly look forward to the start of another. It is a great time to set personal and business goals for the coming year. It is even a better time to pause for a moment and consider a few what if scenarios.

What if you were to become disabled due to a serious illness, an accident, or advanced aging? What if you were to die suddenly due to a tragic accident or aggressive disease? Imagine having your spouse, child, or employee step into your shoes tomorrow and picking up where you left off. Will they be successful in doing it? Do they know all the things you do on a regular basis? This is the perfect time to plan ahead to minimize the emotional burden and financial impact on your family and farm business. Make it easier on your loved ones by organizing and sharing your personal and financial information and end of life wishes before it is needed.

There are several resources available for life and death planning. Consulting with financial, insurance, and estate planning experts is recommended. As well as having a relationship with a trusted lawyer. I used a website founded by Chanel Reynolds to help me get started planning for my “what if” scenarios. A checklist helped me identify key documents and tasks while keeping track of my progress. Generating a master document for my family that serves as a road map for locating personal and financial information was critical. The checklist and master document should be reviewed yearly or anytime there is a major life change, such as marriage, a new baby, or a new business venture.

Here are some of the major tasks that I expected to be on the checklist:

- Creating a will and naming an executor of the estate to oversee the terms of the will.
- Setting up a power of attorney (POA).
- Establishing a guardian for living dependents.
- Creating/updating beneficiaries on plans such as life insurance, IRAs and 401(k)s.
- Creating a living will and naming a medical power of attorney.
- Discussing end of life plan with family and friends.
- Making funeral arrangements.

Here are some of the tasks that I did not think of without the checklist:

- Telling family and friends the location of your will, master document, and other important personal information.
- Identifying family/friend contacts and providing their contact information.
- Documenting medical insurance information, primary care physician, and medications.
- Creating a list of:
  1. Monthly bills with typical charges, due dates, and payment type (electronically or check).
  2. User ids and passwords.
  3. Bank accounts, insurance policies, and investments.
  4. Owed and borrowed debts.
  5. Email and social media accounts.
- Reviewing available money in emergency fund.
- Writing letters to family members telling them how much you love them to be shared at the appropriate time.

I know that doing all of these things feels rather grim. However, remember that we do them to help our loved ones in the future. Don’t procrastinate. Take the time and get these things done. Best wishes for a happy and health new year!

— Heather Dann

dann@whminer.com

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2015 Vermont Dairy Producers Conference
Tuesday, February 24, 2015, 8 am - 4 pm
Sheraton Conference Center, South Burlington, VT
Speakers include:
Dr. Julio O. Giordano, Cornell University; Jay Waldvogel, DFA; Dr. Nigel B. Cook, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Dr. Joe Schwarz, McGill University; Mark Andrew Junkin, Agriculture Strategy; Dr. Thomas R. Overton, Cornell University.

Contact: Reg Chaput for additional information 802-988-2844

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Curt Gooch and Sam Steinberg of Cornell University's Biological and Environmental Engineering Department co-authored an article that outlines the do's and dont's of roof snow removal. The article can be found online at http://prodairy.cals.cornell.edu/SnowRemoval.pdf
As of October 1, it is illegal to not only text while driving, but also to speak on a hand held electronic device/cell phone while driving in VT. So now my entire commute NY & VT, can be in peace without feeling the obligation to talk to people while driving. Actually, a wise decision to make it illegal to use cell phones in any manner while driving. Since October 1, I have noticed that quite a few drivers still use their cell phones, ignoring the new law. Since my commute is rather long, and there’s not much else to do… I decided to run a bit of research and keep track of the primary culprits of illegal cell phone usage; men or women. I decided to run this trial on my morning commute into work, since it was day light and I could clearly see the on-coming drivers. At first I thought this would simply be an incrimination of men as 3 male drivers were immediately observed using cell phones. After a few days the count increased to 4 to 1 male to females, then 5 – 2, a few days later it was 6-4 in favor of the men illegally using their cell phones.

I began to ponder adding some demographic data to my collection but quickly decided that I was becoming a distracted driver myself and that trying to document vehicle type, hair styles, and clothing styles was going to be a bit much. Though, the majority of male cell phone users were driving pickup trucks with racks and construction equipment on the back. I can only guess that they were diligent business managers calling ahead to clients and suppliers regarding their work. Or maybe they were asking for help managing their fantasy football team as they likely do not have access to a computer at their workplace like some of us. The women were mostly driving small cars, mini-vans or Highlanders. I began to consider that their rationale for being on the phone might involve either: 1. Phoning home to make sure the teenage kids were up and off to school since they have 3 study hall periods to start their day; or 2. Mom was calling day-care provider or doctors’ office to inform of late arrival having had to deal with breakfast, dogs, kids and some of her own professional work first thing in the morning….

After 8 days of observations the men continued to hold a slight lead over the women 7- 5 and as I was drawing near to the end of my designated observation period, I was trying to formulate my conclusions about male drivers disobeying the law more than females. Then came day 10.

A flurry of important stuff must have been going on as the women mounted an early morning comeback, 8-7, just a few miles later a Highlander veered across the center line causing me to swerve, yes, female! 8 – 8 Tie Game with only 15 miles remaining in my final day of data collection. Oh, there was pandemonium in the car. Me. But just 5 miles later, a young male, driving a small pickup, slumped to his right in the “I’m not using my cell phone position, just driving comfortably with chin resting in palm, elbow on center console” but clearly speaking into device. NOOOOOO! 9-8 the men regain the lead. In regulation data collection time, the men outscore the women in illegal use of cell phones, final score 9-8. However in the 2 days after the collection period 2 females were observed clearly enjoying boisterous cell phone conversations while driving.

Granted these data should be expressed as percentages of the male and female drivers observed, which would clearly indicate a higher percentage of women illegally use cell phones when driving than men. But more importantly….

Why? Why take the risk; financially you are facing a $100-$200 fine for the first offense in VT and up to $500 for subsequent offenses. And more importantly why put yourself and others at risk of injury? Cell phone usage increases your risk of crash by 4x; texting increases the risk 23x (National Safety Council). I know that 100% of our readership obeys these driving laws 100% of the time. But clearly, many out there still do not. Please, encourage others, kids, friends to be safe, simply drive and focus. The phone can wait.

Wishing you safe travels and a happy holiday season.

— Kurt Cotanch
cotanch@whminer.com

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*Box score* Incidence of illegal cell phone usage while driving by day of observation period.
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