

Ask the Vet: June is Dairy Month!

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Since June is Dairy Month, I thought I'd do something a little different and discuss a little bit about dairy production and cow care. Iowa has about 215,000 dairy cows on 1,800 farms across the state, contributing over 26,000 jobs and \$1.5 billion to the economy. South Dakota's dairy industry is smaller with only about 390 dairy farms, but 209 million gallons of milk are produced annually in the state generating \$319 million each year.

The dairy industry has certainly changed over the years, from each farm milking a handful of cows along with taking care of other types of livestock, to a much more specialized system where hundreds to thousands of cows are milked on a single farm. However, almost all of these operations are still family owned and family run. There is still a large diversity of farms. Some are pasture-based systems where the cows go out and eat grass during the day and are herded into the barn to be milked. In this area of the country, this model is not sustainable year-round and feed needs to be supplemented when pasture is unavailable. Many operations have transitioned to a TMR, or total-mixed-ration system. This means that a variety of feedstuffs are mixed together and then fed to the cows. It has become quite a science to develop these rations for maximum production of milk and to maintain the health of the cows. Modern dairy production has become extremely efficient; in 1996, South Dakota would have needed an additional 24,000 cows to produce the same amount of milk it produced in 2009.

Cow care is always important to the dairy farmer. Cows produce milk when they are laying and resting, so much is invested in bedding and mattresses where they cows like to spend their time. Protection from brutal winter conditions, and fans and sprinklers during the hot summer keep the cows happy and healthy. There are times though when a cow may get sick or get an infection in her udder. Farmers find these problems quickly and get the cows treated with an appropriate medication or call the veterinarian to assist. After a cow has been treated, her milk must be thrown away until no antibiotics are present. If milk with antibiotic residues is found in the bulk tank, all the milk (and income) from the past couple of days has to be wasted, so producers are very careful to avoid this.

Overall, dairy farmers take great care of their cows and work hard to provide a safe and wholesome product for your family to enjoy. This is just a small look at dairy health. If you would like to learn more, visit the Midwest Dairy Association at www.midwestdairy.com or speak with a local dairy producer.