

In the midst of one of the harshest dairy outlooks and worst recessions in our lifetimes, it is easy to become totally discouraged about farming. The challenge is to tighten up expenses as much as possible without sacrificing production or basic management. These tough decisions can absolutely consume us with worry and fear.

It can become a creative challenge to ensure the basics are being covered without adding costs to production. Similar to coaching a sports team, we need to manage our dairies focusing on the fundamentals and not get caught up in the frills, extras and “fancy plays”.

So starting at the beginning of a calf’s life, here are the basic 5 “C’s”:

- ❑ Colostrum-The most important food a calf ever consumes
- ❑ Cleanliness- Involves feeding utensils, colostrum handling, milk replacer mixing- all things that go into a calf’s mouth!
- ❑ Comfort- This means clean and dry (and reasonably warm in the winter-calf jackets are calf savers)
- ❑ Consistency-Just like cows, calves like total routine in their daily care.
- ❑ Calories-especially in the winter months, quantity of milk replacer must be increased to ensure growth and maintenance.

In the world of adult cows, the breeding program becomes an opportunity to tighten up areas that can make a big difference. Again the basics should prevail. Tending promptly to fresh cows with uterine infections doesn’t cost much and provides solid returns. Basic heat detection can never be over-emphasized. Many herds have hired labor performing most of the cow moving and watching and many of these folks have only limited understanding of basic cattle reproduction. Reviewing the signs of heat detection and the reasons this is so critical to a farm’s economic success is an inexpensive way to improve breeding success. If you are using synchronizing programs, make sure the timing is what you want it to be, that the injections are being done with accuracy (the right cow getting the right injection at the right time).

Milk quality is another area of opportunity in down economic times. If you are having too many clinical cases, too high a SCC, fresh cows calving with mastitis, or workers unwilling to follow your milking procedures, you have an excellent opportunity to improve your profitability. Knowing what kind of mastitis you are dealing with is a place to start by culturing clinical cases. Reviewing your treatment protocols with your herd veterinarian may uncover some cost savings. Many cases of mastitis don’t justify antibiotic treatment and we are all aware of how costly these drugs are. Focusing on preventive strategies, like teat dipping, dry cow therapy, using Orbeseal, and stall maintenance can all improve milk quality parameters.

And lastly, don't toss the baby out with the bath water by eliminating successful prevention and control measures like vaccination programs. If you can manage costly diseases like BVD, leptospirosis, pneumonia, and mastitis with vaccines instead of treatment, you will be ahead in the long run. Consider reviewing your vaccine protocols with us to clarify if you are getting the most for your money. Are you over-vaccinating, under-vaccinating, overlooking some group of animals, unaware of new vaccines and strategies?

Above all, work with us. We are in this together and are committed to your success.