

A Reproductive
Moment With

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WHAT'S REALLY MOST IMPORTANT?

by Mel DeJarnette, Reproductive Specialist

It seems like everyone is burning the candle at both ends these days. There are more things to do than there are hours in the day to get things done. Demands on our time pull us in all different directions until it eventually becomes apparent that some of the things on our “to do” list just aren’t gonna happen. That almost happened with this article. When things begin to get overwhelming, it’s very important to slow down and sit down long enough to prioritize. If you’re like me, you always try to keep family at the top of the list, but after that, the lines begin to blur. A handy scale we often use around the office to prioritize various projects is the “must do,” “should do,” or “would like to do” scale. “**Must do’s**” are those projects that must be done and take priority over all others. “**Should do’s**” are fit in at the next convenient opportunity, and “**like to do’s**” are rainy day projects that often get shoved to the back burner for a while. If you’re finding there are not enough hours in the day to get all the chores done at your dairy, it may be time to prioritize to make sure the important tasks are staying up front and are not being pushed to the back burners.

HEAT DETECTION IS A “MUST DO”

I am both amazed and troubled by the frequency with which I find heat detection treated as a “**should do**” or a would “**like to do**” task rather than a “**must do**.” The number one factor affecting the profitability of any animal breeding enterprise (dairy, beef, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, etc.) is reproduction. Each breeding age animal is a fixed asset that often carries a considerable financial investment. Maintaining a reasonable calving interval is critically important to the lifetime production, profitability, and potential return on investment for each cow in the herd. We’ve all heard the dollar values associated with extended calving intervals bounced around from time to time. Depending on input cost, output values and whose calculation method you use, these “costs of days open” can range from \$1 to \$5. Most experts accept \$3 as a reasonable number for the average herd. A missed heat cycle basically extends the calving interval by 21 days and, at \$3/day, costs the bottom line of the dairy operation in excess of \$60. And that’s just for one cow. Normally, 4-5% of your open and cycling animals will be in heat on any given day. Just for grins and giggles, take the number of open cows in your herd and multiply by 5% and then multiply by \$60. That’s a ballpark figure as to how much a day without heat detection may be costing you. Divide this number by two to get the cost of skipping just one of the two daily heat check periods. Not funny is it? When you sit down and run the numbers, it’s hard to imagine any job on the farm, other than feeding or milking, taking a higher priority than heat detection. Few jobs on the farm will pay a higher return on investment than the labor spent on good, sound heat detection. Keep heat detection a “**must do**” priority.

PROPER SEMEN HANDLING IS A “MUST DO”

When it comes to getting cows bred, there are often many things working against you over which you have little or no control including the weather, feed quality, stress associated with high milk production, and sporadic disease outbreaks. Semen handling may be the only aspect of reproduction that the inseminator has direct and total control over the outcome. All too often, technicians attempt to take shortcuts and deviate from recommended semen handling procedures which may save a few seconds to a minute at most. However, if the animal fails to conceive due to reduced semen quality as a result of these shortcuts, how much time and money will be lost as we attempt to catch her in heat again for rebreeding? Don’t let something so simple and easy to control as semen handling be the limiting factor for reproductive performance in your herd.

HERD HEALTH IS A “MUST DO”

Congregating a population of any animal species into close proximity without a sound program to prevent introduction and spread of diseases, is an accident waiting to happen. And sooner or later, it will happen. Even if you’re maintaining a closed herd and not purchasing animals, the bugs don’t know that and they wouldn’t particularly care if they did know. There are numerous other methods for them to get in and infect your herd. Birds, rodents, deer, raccoons, and vehicle tires or boots of friends and salesmen are but a few potential vectors. Work closely with your veterinarian to vaccinate against all diseases of concern in your geographic area. Be especially careful when introducing new animals into the herd. If possible, have them tested for diseases of concern while located at the farm of origin. Keep them