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Nutritional grouping bolsters feed efficiency

FEE D efficiency is enhanced when lactating cows are grouped and fed according to their energy and nutrient requirements. Currently, the proportion of dairy farms in the Upper Midwest grouping cows for nutritional purposes is unknown. Furthermore, the reasons behind current grouping practices and constraints to implementing greater nutritional grouping are poorly understood.

To better comprehend this situation, a survey was mailed to commercial dairy farmers in Wisconsin and Michigan in 2012. The survey was sent to all dairy farmers with 200 or more lactating cows in Wisconsin and to a random sample of 800 farms of all herd sizes in Michigan. Twenty percent of the Wisconsin surveys (196 of 971) were returned along with 211 from Michigan (26 percent of 800; 59 herds had 200 or more lac-

tating cows). This article provides descriptive information about what we have learned from the survey on nutritional grouping decisions.

The average number of lactating cows per surveyed herd was 603 for Wisconsin and 205 for Michigan. Also, the reported rolling herd average (pounds per cow per year) was 26,802 and 22,913 in Wisconsin and Michigan, respectively. Farms with 200 or more lactating cows in Michigan, though, had a similar RHA to Wisconsin herds (25,929 pounds per cow per year). In both states, most of the nutritional consulting was performed by private consultants, feed companies or a combination of the two.

Aside from fresh cow diets, 37 percent of Wisconsin and 24 percent of Michigan herds with 200-plus lactating cows, and 72 percent of Michigan herds with less than 200 lactating cows, reportedly fed the same diet to all lactating cows.

In both states, farmers agreed that fresh cow and first-lactation heifer groups were the most important criteria for grouping. The third most reported criterion in both states was grouping based on health


issues and days in milk.

For herds with 200-plus cows in both states, the three main criteria for feeding different diets to lactating cows were: feeding a separate fresh cow group, feeding based on stage of lactation and feeding according to milk production level. Stage of lactation and milk production level in addition to body condition score were also important on Michigan farms with less than 200 lactating cows.

The reported limitations on additional nutritional grouping were to keep management simple and a belief that milk production drops when cows are moved to a different group. In this regard, recent research showed that social dominance correlates with age, body size and seniority in the herd, and plays a role in newly formed groups. Typically, dominant cows spend more time at the feedbunk eating than cows of lower social rank. It also has been reported that depression in feed consumption and milk production related to social dominance might lessen as group size becomes larger.

Whereas some researchers found a 2.5 to 8.5 percent drop in milk pro-

duction due to social disturbances one to seven days after regrouping, others have not found any effect on milk yield when moving cows from one group to another. Recent research also has found that reducing stocking density or expanding pen size could reduce the negative effects of regrouping lactating cows.

Feeding closer to actual nutritional requirements and grouping of lactating cows have been suggested as a means of improving feed efficiency and profitability. We found that there are still a significant proportion of dairy farmers that could markedly improve feed efficiency by implementing additional grouping for nutritional purposes. 

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New research and decision support tools are available at the University of Wisconsin Dairy Management website <http://DairyMGT.info>. Tools: Grouping strategies for feeding lactating dairy cattle, to help evaluate the advantages of nutritional groups.

CUT OFF HERE

85th Annual Hoard's Dairyman Cow Judging Contest

YOUR OFFICIAL ENTRY BLANK

DIVISIONS

SENIORS — Anyone 19 years of age or older as of March 19, 2015.

Only one entry per person in the Senior Division.

JUNIORS — Anyone 8 to 18 years of age as of March 19, 2015.

Only one entry per person in the Junior Division.

Twelve CASH PRIZES in each of the Senior and Junior Divisions:

\$100 \$75 \$60 \$50 \$45 \$40 \$35 \$30 \$25 \$20 \$15 \$10

FAMILIES — Must include three or more immediate family members, all 8 years or older, at least one senior division entry, and all entered on one entry blank. Only one entry per family.

Four CASH PRIZES — \$100 \$75 \$50 \$25

SPECIAL ENTRY BLANKS* are needed for the following four divisions:

4-H CLUBS/JUNIOR BREED ORGANIZATIONS, FFA/AG-ED CHAPTERS, TECHNICAL

SCHOOLS, COLLEGE TEAMS — Four CASH PRIZES in each division — \$100 \$75 \$50 \$25

AG-ED INSTRUCTORS — Four CASH PRIZES — \$100 \$75 \$50 \$25

*Write to: Contest Dept., Hoard's Dairyman, P.O. Box 801, Ft. Atkinson, WI 53538-0801 or email judging@hoards.com

RULES

1. Only one entry per division (see opposite), but an individual may enter in more than one division. For example, you may enter with your 4-H club, family and as an individual; but your 4-H club and your family may enter only once.
2. Entries must be postmarked on or before **MARCH 19, 2015**.
3. All individuals entering in the 4-H, FFA/Ag-Ed, College, Family or Ag-Ed Instructor Divisions also are automatically entered in the Junior or Senior Division and are eligible to receive cash prizes in those divisions.
4. Contest is open to everyone except Hoard's Dairyman employees and members of their families.
5. Mail entries to: Contest Dept., Hoard's Dairyman, P.O. Box 801, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-0801.
6. Keep a copy of your placings — no entries returned.
7. Indicate your choice for "Supreme Winner" by circling the letter of your overall favorite cow in the contest. (For example, you placed the Brown Swiss class **A**B-C-D and **A** is your selection for "Supreme Winner.") Please select only one winner.

ENTRIES MUST BE POSTMARKED ON OR BEFORE MARCH 19, 2015 OR ENTER ONLINE AT JUDGING.HOARDS.COM

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME	AGE	JANUARY 10 1ST CLASS				JANUARY 25 2ND CLASS				FEBRUARY 10 3RD CLASS				FEBRUARY 25 4TH CLASS				MARCH 10 5TH CLASS				Total
		BROWN SWISS				HOLSTEIN				GUERNSEY				MILKING SHORTHORN				JERSEY				
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	

NAME _____ PHONE _____

RFD _____

ST. _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

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