

Reproductive Herd Health Program



IRM-18

Dairy Integrated Reproductive Management

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A reproductive herd health (RHH) program is a systematic, planned effort by a dairy producer and veterinarian to maximize reproductive efficiency and to minimize reproductive diseases and problems. A RHH program involves a record-keeping system (Fact Sheet IRM-4), regularly-scheduled examinations and periodic analysis of records (Fact Sheet IRM-5) and examination findings. RHH is an important part of a complete herd health program which should be established in every herd.

Reproductive Goals

Each dairy producer establishes reproductive goals for the herd. These goals are not the same for every herd. Herd reproductive parameters are determined at the start of a RHH program and re-evaluated at least twice a year. Goals need to be updated as the herd situation changes. Some possible goals are:

- Age at first estrus -less than 12 months
- Age at first breeding -13-15 months
- Age at first calving -24 months
- Size at first calving (Holstein) -1,200 lbs
- Calves dead at birth -less than 5%
- Calf mortality, birth to freshening -less than 10%
- Interval to first observed estrus -less than 45 days
- Interval—calving to first breeding -less than 80 days or average 75 days
- Days open -less than 110 days
- Calving interval -12-13 months
- First service conception rate -50% or greater
- Services per conception -less than 1.7
- Abortions -less than 4%
- Retained placentas -less than 8%
- Metritis (uterine infection) -less than 10%
- Cystic ovaries -less than 10%
- Repeat breeders (more than 2 services) -less than 15%

Reproductive Records

A variety of records are necessary to maintain reproductive efficiency, monitor reproductive parameters, and ensure efficient use of the veterinarian. These records include:

- Heat expectancy chart or calendar
- Breeding chart
- DHIA reproductive report
- Individual cow health/reproduction card
- Reproductive exam worksheet

Maintain an individual, lifetime record for each cow in the herd. Record all reproductive information including fresh dates, heat dates, breeding dates, exam dates and findings, treatments and vaccinations on this card. Both the dairy producer and the veterinarian should refer to this card at the time of any examination or reproductive event involving the cow.

A RHH worksheet lists each cow to be examined at the time of the regular veterinary visit. This will ensure that time is not wasted and no cow is overlooked. Other examinations or procedures such as foot trimming, vaccination or dehorning also may be listed on this worksheet.

Reproductive Examinations

Each dairy producer should establish a schedule with the veterinarian for regular RHH examinations. In many small-to-medium size herds this is done once a month. In larger herds, examinations may be every 2 weeks or weekly. All records should be available and up-to-date at the time of the exam. A worksheet listing all cows to be examined will facilitate the visit. Cows to be examined:

1. **Routine postpartum examination:** All cows fresh 15 to 45 days should be examined regardless of whether they have had any problems at calving. Postpartum exams detect infections or abnormalities at an early stage. The veterinarian also may be able to determine onset and stage of estrous cycle at this time.

2. **Pregnancy examination:** Cows bred 40 days or more that have not returned to estrus should be checked for pregnancy. Individual veterinarians may want to check cows at an earlier or later time than 40 days post-insemination.
3. **Abnormal cows:** All cows that had an abortion, retained placenta, infection, abnormal discharge or abnormal length of estrous cycle should be examined. A red to reddish-brown discharge from the uterus is normal during the 7 to 14 days after calving. If this discharge persists beyond 2 weeks, has a bad odor, or if the cow is sick, she should be examined. Any cow fresh more than 50 days that has not been observed in estrus should be examined even if she received a postpartum exam at an earlier date.
4. **Repeat breeders:** Any cow that has been serviced 3 or more times and not confirmed pregnant should be examined (Fact Sheet IRM-23).

At the time of the veterinarian's regular herd health visit, all exam findings, treatments and instructions should be recorded on the individual herd health cards or on the worksheet for later transfer to the cards. If examinations are not recorded, it is unlikely that the findings will be remembered next month or next year.

Results of Reproductive Herd Health Program

A RHH program should increase reproductive efficiency and be cost-effective if it is to have a place in a modern dairy enterprise. Several studies have shown that a regular RHH program reduces days open by 10 to 40 days. The cost of RHH programs varies with the herd situation and with the area. Most dairy producers find that regularly-scheduled exams eliminate some other herd visits and more efficiently utilize veterinary services.

A RHH program is one part of efficient, economically-successful dairying.

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