

Finding Satisfaction in the Ups and Downs of Your Dairy Farm Business

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Dairying has its ups and downs. From the title, you may have thought of milk price going up or down or of feed prices going up or down. These are obvious real world examples, but in today's dairy farm businesses, it may not be so simple as UPS or DOWNS. As we look at our dairy operations, implementing production or financial practices that can influence the different directions of these UPS and DOWNS could bring great satisfaction.

First, let's look at aspects we might want to be going up:

- Milk production per cow
- Dry matter intake (DMI)
- Pregnancy rate
- Genetic merit (PTA Net Merit \$) of service sires
- Income over feed cost
- Milk production per employee
- Relative feed value (RFV)
- Return on assets
- Net worth
- Net returns
- Cow lying time, stall usage, percentage of cows chewing their cud
- Heat detection

Next, let's look at things we might want to go down:

- Somatic cell count (SCC)
- Services per conception (S/C)
- Days open (DO)
- Calving interval (CI)
- Age at first calving (AFC)
- Death loss
- Difficult calvings, stillbirths
- Disease incidence rate, percentage of lame cows
- Feed cost per hundredweight (cwt.) of milk
- ADF of forages
- Herd turnover rate
- Days to first service
- Cost of production (COP)
- Debt to assets

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It would be nice if we could wave a magic wand and instantly make whatever aspect of production or financials of our dairy farm businesses go in the direction we wanted it to go. That is not possible but with goals and effort making such change is possible.

Sometimes the DOWNS and UPS can be related. For example,

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ↓ Somatic cell count can mean | ↑ Milk production |
| ↓ Death loss can result in | ↑ Number of heifer replacements |
| ↓ ADF can result in | ↑ DMI |
| ↓ Age at first calving can increase | ↑ Lifetime milk yield |
| ↓ Herd turnover rate can improve | ↑ Longevity |

Likewise, DOWNS and DOWNS can be related.

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|--|----------------------|
| ↓ Days open can reduce | ↓ Calving interval |
| ↓ Services per conception can reduce | ↓ Semen cost |
| ↓ Days to first service can lower | ↓ Days open |
| ↓ Feed cost per cwt. of milk can lower | ↓ Cost of production |
| ↓ Mastitis incidence can reduce | ↓ Treatment cost |

Similarly, UPS can go with UPS:

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|---------------------|-----------------|
| ↑ Milk production | ↑ Gross revenue |
| ↑ Dry matter intake | ↑ Milk yield |

Finally, there can be UPS associated with DOWNS

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|------------------|------------------------|
| ↑ RFV | ↓ Tons of hay required |
| ↑ Pregnancy rate | ↓ S/C and semen cost |

There is no better time than now to begin to set goals for the directions in which you want things to move in your dairy farm business. And when you have achieved the goals you have set, you will likely find satisfaction and may even ask yourself “Now why didn’t I start working on this before?”