

Be Persnickety When Managing Your Dairy Herd!



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Have you ever owned a persnickety cow that just wanted to do her own thing and did not want to be messed with? During the KDDC Fall Farm Tours and at their virtual tour at World Dairy Expo, Pam and Scott, owners of Selz-Pralle Dairy, described their cow, Aftershock 3918, a national milk production record holder for the Holstein breed, in this manner. Aftershock 3918 just wanted to be left alone to do the things she is good at—eat, rest, ruminate, and produce milk. Only after the rest of the farmers on our bus tour had moved on to look at other cows in the herd, did Aftershock 3918 “pose” and let me get her picture!! Notice, she was eating, not just standing there annoyed at the attention from visitors.



This world record holder is housed in a herd of 450 milking cows averaging 35,000 lbs milk, where 11 cows averaged over 50,000 lbs milk and an additional 73 cows averaged over 40,000 lbs milk. The Selz-Pralle dairy’s goal is to produce 7 lbs of fat and protein per cow daily. So, what are the Selz-Pralle Dairy’s management strategies to get their cows to milk? Let’s explore some of the key components of their management program they undoubtedly will be discussing.

Be Consistent—Make Doing It Right Every Day a Habit

When listening to both Pam and Scott, this message comes through very clearly in how they manage both the calves and cows, what they expect, and the message they foster to their employees. They do not believe in short cuts, but do believe in being persnickety, paying close attention and completing the details associated with each job on the farm. To accomplish tasks, protocols need to be in place to ensure consistency and they need to be followed every day by everyone.

Healthy Cows Start as Healthy Calves

Attention to details starts at birth and follows throughout a calf’s young life. Within 15 minutes of life, calves are fed 4 quarts of colostrum of which the antibody concentration always is measured using a brix

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refractometer. Calves remain in a single pen until they are drinking milk well at approximately 14 days of age. Then, they transition into a new calf barn in group pens, each with 5 calves of the same age and speed of drinking milk.

Ventilation is critical for healthy calves. To ensure the fans were working correctly in the new calf barn, they tested how quickly an introduced smoke cleared from the facility and adjusted the variable-speed fans accordingly. In the group pens, calves are fed with a group or “gang” feeder. Sanitation of the nipples and not just the “gang” milk feeder itself is critical in disease prevention.



Cow-friendly Environment Helps Recoup

Pam and Scott credit their success to providing their cows with a comfortable environment where cows can easily get to the feedbunk, rest, and ruminate. Stocking density is capped at 1.05 cows per stall with stalls groomed daily where new sand is added weekly. They are constantly looking for ways to take cow comfort to a new level. Cows are fed a balanced diet composed of high quality forages where they believe that packing and storage of the brown midrib variety of corn silage is very important. They consider their dairy cows athletes and as such need an environment where they can excel and express their genetics.



Be a Cow Whisperer – Look and Listen to Your Cows

Even though this herd consists of 450 milking cows, each cow is managed one at a time. Pam and Scott strive to prevent diseases versus treating cows. If issues do arise, cows are treated immediately. The earlier sick cows are detected and treated if necessary, the quicker you can turn them around. They use the SCR system to help monitor rumination times, as well as activity to detect cows in heat, on a daily basis. Cows ruminating less than 200 minutes daily are flagged and then evaluated. Scott attributes this system to helping him detect sick cows 1 to 2 days earlier than previously.

Motivate your team to believe in your passion

Pam and Scott very quickly give credit to their employees for helping implement a successful management program on their farm. They believe in motivating their employees to believe in their passion for farming and dairy cows and to take ownership in the successes, and it shows.

Pam Selz-Pralle and Scott Pralle love to dairy farm and it shows, not only if you have the opportunity to visit their herd, but also when they speak about their operation