Dairy Calf and Heifer Association conference takes the gold

More than 1.5 million cattle from 34 states and 14 countries represented at annual event

The Dairy Calf and Heifer Association (DCHA) annual conference offered a diverse lineup of speakers and producer panels, unveiled new industry insights and provided unmatched networking. More than 500 dairy calf and heifer growers, dairy farmers and allied industry professionals who represent more than 1.5 million cattle, attended the 2018 DCHA conference, April 10-12 in Milwaukee, Wis. Attendees traveled from 34 states and 14 countries.

“This year’s DCHA conference set the bar far for calf and heifer raisers to take their individual programs to the next step on the podium,” said Lane Sollenberger, DCHA president and general manager of Dream Farms in Newburg, Pa. “The information shared by keynote speakers and producer panels paired with exceptional farm and industry tours, educational breakout sessions, trade show and unmatched networking has elevated the level of education and expertise shared at the conference.”

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Farm and industry tours:** The conference kicked off with industry tours at Milk Products or STgenetics. Attendees learned about the latest in genomic testing and sexing technology in bovine genetics at STgenetics in Fond du Lac, Wis. Milk Products, Chilton, Wis. provided a behind-the-scenes tour of their milk replacer manufacturing facility. The tour wrapped up at Vir-Clar Farms in Fond du Lac, Wis., where members learned about individual calf care and cleanliness from Katie Grinstead, calf manager.

- **Educational sessions:** During the two-day conference, members learned about a variety of hot topics including calf immunity, group housing, ventilation systems, managing employees, feed center management, feedlot management, cattle transportation and more.

- **Industry tradeshow:** More than 70 innovative calf- and heifer-focused companies highlighted the latest products, technology and information at their booths.

- **Keynote speaker:** Ty Bennett inspired and engaged attendees with his approach to leadership and business growth.

- **Annual meeting:** DCHA celebrated another successful year and welcomed a new officer team: President TJ McClure, Garden City, Kan., Vice President Elizabeth Quinn, Schaghticoke, N.Y., Secretary/Treasurer Tamilee Nennich, Freeport, Minn., Rachel O’Leary, Janesville, Wis., and Marina Sweet, Columbus, Ohio, were recognized as 2018 scholarship winners.
Improve heifers’ opportunity to survive and thrive

Respiratory disease and scours are the two leading causes of calf death loss and disease incidence in the first year of life. On average, 23.9 percent of preweaned dairy heifers in the U.S. are affected by scours and 12.4 percent are affected by respiratory disease. Further, the cost of poor calf health is significant and long-lasting. For example, calves with respiratory disease that required treatment produced about 1,087 pounds less milk in the first lactation than calves with no record of being treated. Research shows that heifers that had pneumonia have approximately two times greater risk of death before calving than those that did not have to fight the disease. Meanwhile, data also demonstrate that scours cases increase heifer death risk prior to calving by 2.5 times. Disease incidence and calf mortality heavily influence heifer replacement costs, which can be the second-highest expense on dairy farms, averaging from 8.6 percent up to 20 percent of total production costs in Holstein herds. These facts heighten the need to focus on and improve calf well-being in every way possible, beginning with your genomic breeding program. The new calf wellness traits included in the Clarifide® Plus test pull back the curtain on an incidence of calf liability, calf respiratory disease and scours to enhance overall animal well-being. Calf wellness traits help producers identify and breed for calves less likely to become ill due to respiratory disease or scours, as well as animals that are more likely to survive up to calving. Blueprint for success To optimize the advantages of genomic testing to improve calf and cow wellness, be sure that your genomic testing program includes all of the key ingredients to achieve your desired outcomes, including:

- The most inclusive index available — Dairy Wellness Profit Index® (DWP$®). Current indexes, such as Net Merit Index, do not include key calf wellness information and may be negatively associated with some of these traits.
- DWP$ helps improve the outcome of the calf (and cow) wellness traits with their inclusion, thus improving their progress toward enhancing overall herd health.
- A comprehensive approach to dairy wellness and productivity, beginning with an array of genomic traits to predict and achieve healthier, more trouble-free cows and calves.
- The best combination of leadership and expertise in animal health and genetics to help meet the environmental and production stresses of today’s dairies, from calves to cows.
- Accurate genetic predictions for cow and calf wellness traits using established, proven outcomes achieved with cutting-edge genetic evaluation methodology applied to data collected from millions of health records within U.S. commercial herds.

Information provided by Dan Wegel, Director, Outcomes Research, Zoetis, DCHA sponsor.

DCHA transitions management to Gardner & Gardner Communications

New association management effective May 1, 2018

“DCHA is an organization in which we share tremendous passion and commitment,” says Ed Peck, Filament president and CEO. “After five years of refining the vision and value to DCHA members, the association has regained significant strength and momentum. Now is the right time for DCHA to transition to management professionals.”

In early 2018, Filament worked closely with the DCHA Board of Directors to recruit the best management company to host the association and its future goals. “Through a public request for proposals, the DCHA Board of Directors screened all applicants, assigned a transition recruiting committee, and selected Gardner & Gardner Communications as the best, most qualified organization,” says Lane Sollenberger, DCHA president and general manager of Dream Farms in Newburg, Pa. Gardner & Gardner Communications currently manages five other associations, mostly in the agricultural industry. The firm has managed associations for nearly 30 years. Filament and Gardner & Gardner Communications will closely collaborate on the transition details following the annual conference April 10-12 in Milwaukee, Wis., with a unified goal of continuing DCHA’s industry momentum.

References omitted, but available upon request.
Traditional calf feeding programs have fed 2 quarts of milk or milk replacer twice daily with weaning between 6 and 12 weeks of age. This type of program is based on the concept that limiting energy from milk stimulates early intake of dry feed, favoring earlier weaning and lowering cost. However, this practice is unique when compared to feeding behavior of all other mammals in which the young consume milk at will from their dam. More liberal milk or milk replacer feeding programs for preweaned dairy calves have gained favor with the adoption of acidified free-choice and computer-controlled autofeeders. With the acidified free-choice milk feeding systems, there is no limit to how much milk calves can consume. However, automated feeding systems allow you to gradually increase the liquid diet over days. The concern is that allowing the calf to consume large quantities of milk or milk replacer will cause digestive stress and diarrhea. However, feeding more frequently than twice a day reduces this risk.

**Research results**

The University of British Columbia compared growth and health of calves fed milk ad lib to calves 10 percent of bodyweight per day. Ad lib fed calves consumed up to 9 liters per day by five days of age followed by a slight reduction in intake until 14 days when milk intake increased to more than 10 liters per day (1 liter = 1.05 quarts). Calves on both treatments were weaned by gradually diluting their milk with water beginning at 35 days of age with weaning by 42 days. In both groups, starter intake was low for the first three weeks with a slight increase in limit-fed calves. By nine weeks of age, there was no difference in starter intake and there was no difference in incidence of diarrhea. However, the ad lib calves weighed 18 pounds more at the end of the trial. A similar trial on a German dairy farm using autofeeders found that calves allowed ad lib intake consumed over 10 liters per day within four days of entering the autofeeder facility with intake peaking above 14 liters per day. These two studies demonstrate that calves will consume more than 4 quarts of milk or milk replacer early in life. This added nutrition provides needed energy for growth and health.

**Feeding more milk**

When allowed to consume milk or milk replacer according to appetite, calves will eat smaller amounts at one time but more frequently. Attempting to feed large volumes of milk in two feedings per day with uneven intervals between feedings has not been successful because the volume of liquid may exceed the stomach capacity of the calf. With higher liquid feeding rates, the quality of the milk or milk replacer is important. High bacteria count milk or lower quality milk replacers would be more likely to cause digestive upsets. These studies and the experience of calf raisers have shown higher levels of intake are readily achieved by calves early in life with autofeeder or acidified free-choice systems or when calves are fed more frequently (three times per day) at uniform intervals with buckets or bottles. Successfully feeding more milk solids allows you to achieve the DCHA Gold Standards target growth rate of at least doubling birth weight in the first 56 days of life.