

# HEIFER NOTES

Growing Our Future™



**DCHA**

DAIRY CALF & HEIFER ASSOCIATION



## SEEN AND HEARD AT THE 2015 DCHA CONFERENCE



**KEVIN DOTTERER** of GS Dotterer Farm in Rittman, Ohio milks 330 cows each year, while also raising the farm's

calves. "The most important thing to keeping calves healthy is to keep them dry. Keep them bedded and make sure that if you see any little bit of something going on, try to treat them right away. Try to get ahead of whatever is getting after them."



**JANSON PARKER** raises beef cattle and crops on Brad Parker Farms, Snover, Mich. "Don't be afraid to commit more time into

your calves once you feel like they're starting to get sick. Look out for those snotty noses and watery eyes."

## Great milk production starts with great calf care

DCHA member Steven Overstreet finds calf care rewarding work



Overstreet and his team focus on raising the calves in the best environment.

**DAY 1:** The calves start in individual pens in a 960-pen cross ventilated barn. The facility makes it easy to feed and monitor calves because it removes weather conditions that could impact calf growth, making the barn comfortable for both the calves and the people feeding them.

"Here in Texas, we can have very extreme weather patterns both hot and cold. Removing that factor is a big positive," Overstreet says. "We can deliver grain and water without worrying about rain, sleet or snow affecting the quality. The barn set up also makes it easy to clean and disinfect pens between calves, which aids in overall calf health."

The pens are separated by plastic dividers. Each has coated, slatted flooring that can be removed between calves for cleaning and sanitation. The barn has an automatic watering system. Calves are fed whole milk, picked up twice daily from the five farms, and starter feed.

**WEEK 6:** Calves move outdoors to individual hutches until they are weaned at nine weeks. After weaning, they are moved into pens in groups of seven.

**WEEK 10:** Calves move into larger lots in groups of 14.

**WEEK 12:** Calves are moved into groups of 28 and switched to a grower ration. They are also introduced to grass pastures.

**DAY 115:** Calves are shipped to the heifer facility at a different location.

For calf raisers who are thinking about remodeling or building facilities,

Overstreet recommends they think long term. When expanding or retrofitting a facility, it's important to have accurate information about how much space they need for the type of facility they want and a clear vision of the facility's purpose, he says. When building a new facility, it's imperative to build good relationships with agricultural lenders who will stick with you through the challenges, Overstreet says.

Building relationships with other producers through DCHA is also important to successful calf raising, he says.

"I have managed this facility for almost three years, and have attended the DCHA conference three times since coming on board," Overstreet says. "I have met many people at the conference who I have consulted during specific challenges or when I have a specific need. At any time, I can pick up the phone and bounce ideas off of other calf ranch managers I have met at the conference. I really enjoy the trade show every year and have found many products there that I am using on the ranch today."

To take advantage of a DCHA membership, visit [www.calfandheifer.org](http://www.calfandheifer.org). You can also interact with DCHA on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/CalfandHeifer](http://www.facebook.com/CalfandHeifer) and follow @CalfandHeifer on Twitter.

"The best thing about my job is being able to have a meaningful impact on the lives of both people and animals"

Steven Overstreet has fond memories of helping his mom feed calves on his family's East Texas ranch. What was once a lesson in hard work for a child has turned into a rewarding career for Overstreet, now the manager of the 2,500-head Sequoia Calf Ranch in Dublin, Texas.

"The best thing about my job is being able to have a meaningful impact on the lives of both people and animals," Overstreet says. "The work we do caring for the calves ensures they not only survive but thrive to reach their full production potential. That results in quality dairy products for consumers."

The process begins when Overstreet and his employees pick up calves from five farms daily. Over the next 115 days,

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# FROM THE FIELD: Dr. Bob James



Virginia Tech Professor Bob James, Ph.D. became a DCHA board member in April 2015, although he has been a familiar face in the industry for nearly two decades. James was among DCHA's founders in 1996 and previously served as a board member from 2006-2008. What has motivated James to stay with the organization for nearly 20 years? Read on.

## Q: How are you currently involved in the dairy industry?

**A:** I am a professor of dairy science at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., where I have worked since 1980. Early on, my research focused on calves, including the use of automated feeding systems and on-farm pasteurizers. Currently, I do a lot of teaching and extension work, as well as consulting around the U.S. and the world.

## Q: How has the Dairy Calf and Heifer Association benefitted you as a professional?

**A:** Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work with many extremely professional heifer growers and dairy producers who have tremendously expanded my knowledge and experience in the industry.

## Q: What is a challenge facing the calf and heifer industry?

**A:** Animal welfare has always been important, but recently producers are paying more attention than ever to the possibilities including group housing for calves and automated calf feeding.

## Q: Do you have any advice for future dairymen?

**A:** Dairy producers need to have good interpersonal skills and decision skills. Nowadays, you need to work smart, not just hard. Profit margins are tight, and we're living and competing in a world market. One of the things I encourage students to make a habit of is keeping track of what is happening around the U.S. and around the world. That knowledge helps in decision-making on the farm.

## Dairy skid steer safety checklist

Skid steer loaders can be found on most dairy farms and calf and heifer ranches across the country. Don't let frequent use make you forget the importance of regular maintenance. Properly maintained machines are more productive and make life easier on the farm. Pre-operation walk-around inspections are a key part of a solid maintenance plan and should be performed daily. The following check list will help you keep your machine in good working order.

- ✓ **Check the oil and coolant** levels and add more if needed.
- ✓ **Examine the fuel/water separator** and drain water if necessary. Dispose of it properly according to local regulations.
- ✓ **Inspect tires and tire pressure** on both sides; look for cuts and make sure lug nuts are tight.
- ✓ **Check for electrical line** or hydraulic line damage and leaks.
- ✓ **Look for structural problems**, cracks or general damage to the machine.



- ✓ **Check the work tool** for anything out of the ordinary.
- ✓ **Remove any debris** that might have fallen between the lift arm and work tool.
- ✓ **Check the hydraulic oil** and fuel levels.
- ✓ **Grease all fittings** at recommended intervals. Use the maintenance manual provided by the manufacturer to find the fitting locations.

Proper care and maintenance is a crucial element of getting the most out of your skid steer loader. When evaluating manufacturers, be sure to look for a machine with easy access to service compartments, 24-hour parts availability and a dealer network focused on customer service.

Management tip provided by DCHA sponsor Caterpillar. Learn more at [www.cat.com](http://www.cat.com).

## Be a part of the dairy industry's future.

There is one industry-leading source of networking, education and improvement for the raising of dairy calves and heifers. The Dairy Calf and Heifer Association has a renewed commitment to their vision to be just that.

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