The new Gold Standards
Setting the benchmark for your herd’s future

A new edition of the Gold Standards will be available to all DCHA members this fall. The Gold Standards provides a framework for raising heifers, including research-based benchmarks and best management practices. A passionate committee comprised of 15 members including calf and heifer raisers, allied industry professionals and academia have been working on updating the Gold Standards, which was last revised in 2011. These industry leaders have brought their expertise and dedication to calf and heifer raising to this edition of the Gold Standards. This resource is the result of their tireless efforts, which will help drive the industry for years to come.

Dr. Sam Leadley, calf and heifer management specialist for Attica Veterinary Associates, Attica, NY, has been actively involved on the committee and is looking forward to putting the new Gold Standards into practice through his consulting work.

“One big advantage of the revision is the integrated format – all ages in one document with the welfare standards placed next to the relevant practices,” says Leadley.

The new Gold Standards provides the most current standards for calf and heifer raising. Whether you’re a calf and heifer raiser or consultant, you can use this new edition to set goals for success. “At some point in every consulting relationship with clients we end up talking about the dairy’s goals for the calf enterprise,” says Leadley. “The production standards in the Gold Standards provide the framework for this conversation. I use the Gold Standards as a guide to keep the conversation on track in setting farm-specific performance goals.”

It’s important to establish goals to keep the industry, and your herd, moving forward. “The comprehensive list of production standards in the Gold Standards provides a checklist against which heifer management practices may be compared. This is a big improvement over a ‘bits and pieces’ approach that can easily miss opportunities for improving enterprise profitability,” says Leadley.

Full access to the new Gold Standards will be available to all DCHA members this fall. Renew your membership or join starting September 1 to secure your membership through 2017. To renew your membership or become a new member, visit our website: www.calfandheifer.org.

Additional information will be available at:
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When breeding heifers, how big is big enough?

When breeding heifers, how big is big enough? Waiting for heifers to reach height benchmarks can be a costly practice for dairies, leading to delayed first breeding, delayed entry into the milking herd and delayed milk production. The reality is that heifers are genetically predisposed to be different sizes. Genomic testing can more accurately reveal a heifer’s growth potential early in life, allowing producers to accelerate genetic progress with confidence and enhance profitability, all while capitalizing on higher production and profit potential.

Recent herd evaluations from Zoetis show differences in heifer weight and height due to differences in genomic standardized transmitting abilities (STA) for strength and stature. Zoetis evaluations report that at approximately 12 to 13 months of age:

- **Calculated weight varied by approximately 90 pounds due to genetic size differences in genomic STA for strength between -2 and +1.5.**
- **Height varied as much as 2 to 2.5 inches in heifers that varied in differences in genomic STA for stature.** Another way to look at it is that heifer height ranged from 0.5 to 0.87 inches taller per change of +1 in STA for stature.1,2

These evaluations demonstrate how genetics play a large part in heifer growth. Genomic information can give you an estimate of whether a heifer is expected to be bigger or smaller than others at that age. Again, why wait for size alone to determine breeding age? Consider breeding heifers based on age to avoid losing income because they look smaller, when, genetically, heifers will vary in size and some heifers are supposed to be smaller than others. Of course, animals that are noticeably smaller due to previous health challenges are a different story, which is where good health records can help. With the help of genomics, producers can eliminate the guesswork from these decisions.

Information provided by Dave Erf of Zoetis, DCHA sponsor. Visit CLARIFIDE.com to learn more.

1 Data on file, Zoetis Internal Data, April 2014, n > 1600, Zoetis Inc.
2 Data on file, Zoetis Internal Data, March 2014, n = 810, Zoetis Inc.

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Heifer Notes is published quarterly by the Dairy Calf and Heifer Association and distributed to all DCHA members and associated organizations through a partnership with Hoard’s Dairyman.

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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.