



MANAGEMENT *Outlook*

Five Important Factors to Improve TCI™

AgSource members have been utilizing Transition Cow Index® (TCI™) scores for the past several years as a measure of fresh cow management. As an objective measure of transition cow management, these scores are one of the best ways to accurately assess fresh cow health. TCI was developed by Dr. Ken Nordlund at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine.

Nordlund's research didn't stop once he developed the formula for TCI. Work has continued to find out what factors have the greatest influence on TCI. Through this research, Nordlund's team identified five primary factors that are being used to improve fresh cow health in free stall barns.

FACTOR #1: Bunk Space

The most important factor in fresh cow health is providing sufficient feeding space for all transition cows to eat simultaneously. Due to the social nature of cows, they have an instinctive need to eat at the same time. When cows cannot eat at the same time, the cows that eat later eat less and have greater risk of metabolic and immunosuppression problems. To accomplish this goal, a minimum of 30 inches of bunk space per cow is recommended for pre-fresh and post-fresh Holstein cows.

FACTOR #2: Pen Moves and Social Stress

Each time cows are moved into a new pen, a new social hierarchy needs to be established. Typically it takes about 48 hours for the social interaction to stabilize, causing stress on animals within the pen. During this time research has shown that cows deal with the stress by eating less and producing less milk. By limiting or reducing pen moves, stress can be reduced within a herd. In reverse, the social nature of cows also causes undue stress if cows are left in isolation too long. New systems of establishing stable social groups at dryoff are very encouraging.

FACTOR #3: Amply-Sized Free Stalls or Bedded Packs

Facilities need to accommodate the everyday motions of cows including rising, lying, lunging and bobbing. In evaluating facilities, stalls should be at least

50 inches wide for Holsteins and 45 inches for Jerseys. There must be sufficient room to the front without barriers or boss cows.

FACTOR #4: Surface Cushion

Deep sand bedding is preferred in free stalls as it is more comfortable for cows that are commonly tender-footed at the time of calving. If a bedded pack is used, allow 100 feet per cow not counting feeding space.

FACTOR #5: Effective Screening Program

Having staff who understand fresh cows and can effectively spot problems are a key to success with a transition program. Implementing a screening process that allows staff to observe who, when, where and what cows are eating can help identify potential problems. If problems are observed it is important to be able to screen the cows quickly so that additional stress is not added to the cow.

Addressing these five factors in your herd's management can help manager's drastically improve fresh cow health and performance. In return, addressing problems during the transition period can eliminate future problems later in the lactation. Managers with outstanding transition management have seen the investment pay off with healthier more productive cows.



Simson Named Vice President of Northwest Division



Craig Simson has joined AgSource as the Vice President of its Northwest Division. In this position, Simson will oversee the operations of Agri-Check, a soil and plant tissue testing laboratory in Umatilla, Ore. which was acquired by AgSource in 2008, and North West Labs, a milk and forage analysis laboratory in Jerome, Idaho. Both operations are owned jointly with Genex.

Simson holds a Master's of Science degree from the University

of Wisconsin-Madison in Soil Science. Following graduation, Craig worked for the Agricultural Research Stations. He was director of the UW Soil and Forage Analysis Laboratory – before operating a dairy farm in the Marshfield area. During that time, Simson served on the AgSource Board of Directors. Most recently, Simson worked with the USDA-Agricultural Research Service and UW facilities and served as the interim director of the UW Soil and Forage

Analysis Laboratory.

“Craig’s experiences make him uniquely qualified to lead our Northwest operations,” stated Pete Giacomini, Chief Operating Officer for AgSource. “He has experience as a laboratory manager or as a user of services with virtually every aspect of what we do at Agri-Check and North West Labs. We are excited about the leadership he will bring to our business in the Northwest.”

DHI Sample Video Available on Web Site



Have you ever wondered what happens to milk samples once they leave the farm? Now you can see for yourself how a milk sample is turned into valuable DHI information. A four minute video is available on the AgSource Web site, <http://dhi.agsource.com/>. The video shows how a sample arrives at the DHI laboratory, how samples are tested, and how sample data is turned into DHI reports.

Follow AgSource on Twitter

Keeping up on cooperative news just became a little easier. AgSource operates a Twitter page that boasts over 1,000 followers. Twitter is a free social networking service that enables its users to send and read messages. Using Twitter, AgSource has been able to better communicate services offered by the cooperative to a wider audience.

To follow AgSource on Twitter, go to www.twitter.com/agsource.



Can You Afford to Be Without DHI Testing?

While there are many reasons to DHI test, the one that comes to mind most often is to receive somatic cell count (SCC) information. But how important is this information? Let's take a closer look.

Lowering a herd's SCC can have a major effect on profitability. For example, if a herd had a 375,000 SCC lowering that count to 175,000 SCC, would equate to about \$115 per cow per year. These assumptions are based on additional premiums for a herd averaging 25,500 pounds per cow per year. In addition another \$50 per cow could also be expected based on the dropping Linear Scores. While these numbers are only estimates, they do show that significant profits can result if SCC is dropped responsibly.

However, if an operation already has a low SCC, why keep testing when times are tight? Using current milk prices for butterfat at \$1.25 per pound and protein valued at \$2.10 per pound, if comparing two cows both producing 70 pounds a day throughout the lactation to cull, components make a huge difference (See Table 1 below).

Culling the wrong cow can have both short and long term implications. The immediate \$553 loss of components as well as the long term impact on future genetics. Keeping Cow B means she is the one producing the next generation of heifer calves on this dairy, each with \$553 less earning potential than calves from the cow that was culled.

AgSource testing typically costs less than one percent of a dairy farm's total expense. With the information provided by DHI testing, it easily pays for itself.

Dairy producers are finding more value in DHI testing because of improved reports and options. Along with the new products came an investment in field training. This investment allowed Field Technicians to better serve the members by showing the value in the services offered through AgSource. Response from members has been positive and AgSource will continue to look to its membership to find ways to provide even more value in DHI testing.

Table 1 **The Value of Components**

	Pounds/day	Butterfat %	Protein %	Value/day	310 days
Cow A	70	4.2	3.3	\$8.53	\$2,643
Cow B	70	3.0	2.8	\$6.74	\$2,090
Difference				\$1.79	\$553



Tying It All Together

AgSource has worked hard over the past several years to add value to the information that members receive every month. When reports arrive each month, it is easy to look at the information as a series of separate reports that are independent of each other. However, when used together, these reports can tell a powerful story of what is happening on an operation.

Here is an example from one AgSource member. Like everyone else, they are doing all they can to make ends meet. Their DHI Field Technician encouraged the manager to run a Profit Opportunity Analyzer[®] and scheduled a team meeting with the consultants they worked with on a regular basis to review the results. This tool allowed team members to look at the herd performance and compare it to 80th percentile performers in their peer group. The report showed clearly where improvements needed to be made – production.

Although there are a number of areas with some problems, low production was the area demanding the most attention. The graph also pointed out that genetics and reproduction for heifers are strong points comparatively. The consultants, who do an excellent

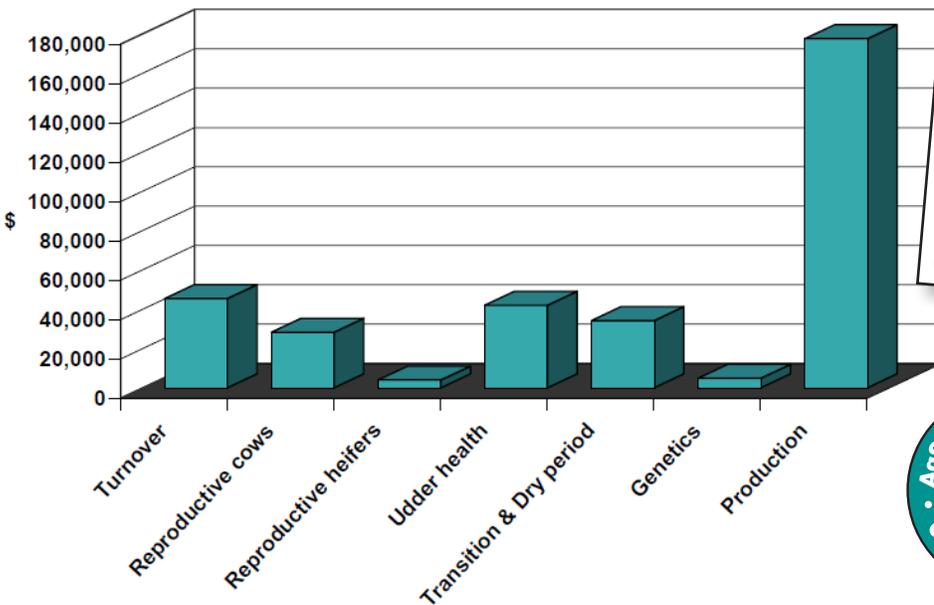
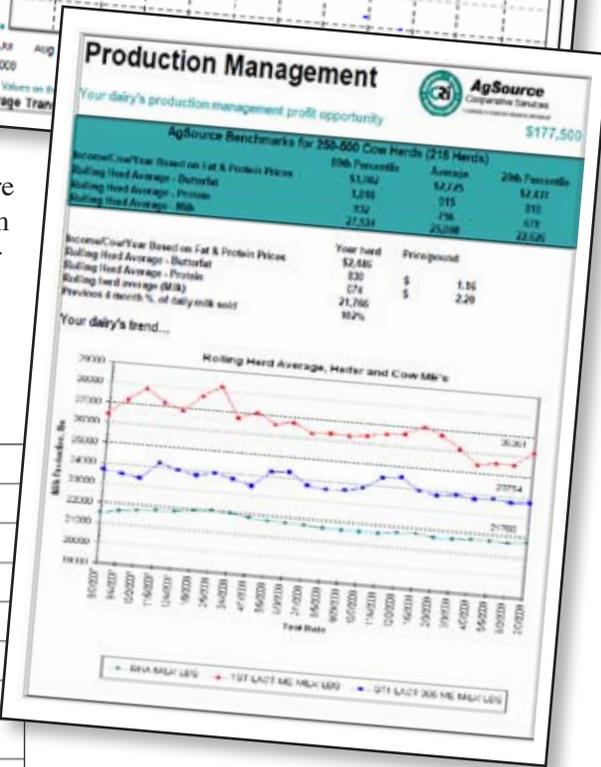
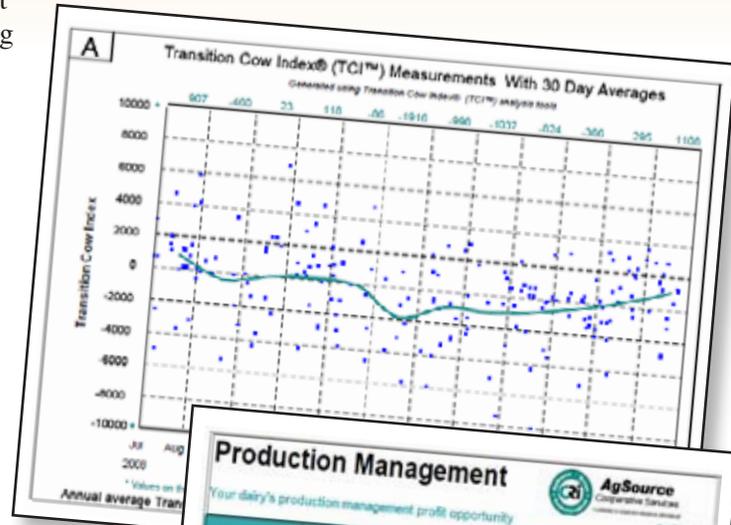
job analyzing fresh cow problems, did a number of measurements of the transition and post freshening areas of the facility and recommended building a new transition facility.

Yet their TCI was at the other end of the spectrum. The AgSource information pointed out that the limiting factor to this herd's production was not the transition area; it was what was happening after that.

The report made them look critically at their free stall barn. They saw a poorly-ventilated six row facility with mattress stalls that were small and not well designed. Cows had numerous hock and joint injuries with persistent lameness issues.

Comparing this herd's production to peer sized operations showed that getting more production out of their cows was an area they needed to focus on. Their income per cow was very close to the bottom 20th percentile mark, and they felt they could do better.

Investment dollars are important and the Profit Opportunity Analyzer stopped this farm's owners from spending these dollars on a transition facility with limited upside potential. Instead, they can focus time and money on remodeling their free stall barn so that it performs to the level of their present transition facility.



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