

Jerseyland Dairy identifies five keys to reproductive success

www.progressivedairy.com/topics/a-i-breeding/jerseyland-dairy-identifies-five-keys-to-reproductive-success



At Jerseyland Dairy LLC, dairy manager Tanner Schmidt knows a solid reproduction program depends on more than just shots and semen; it comes down to having the right people in place, doing the right things at the right time.

Whether that is a breeder, feeder, hoof trimmer or herdsman, each makes a valuable contribution to the overall goal of getting cows bred. The 3,500-cow Jersey dairy located near Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, has improved fertility by making changes to their protocols and assembling an effective, committed team.

“We bumped conception rate by 9 points in the last year-and-a-half,” Schmidt says, noting that first-service conception rate for cows now runs between 38 and 41 percent. “With good people, it’s easy to achieve our goals.”

One of the most recent additions to the farm’s team is Kevin Fehl, an experienced dairy manager whose knowledge and skill with both people and cows has helped raise the bar for reproduction. The dairy also brought on a full-time veterinarian, Dr. Kayla Williams, who assists the repro team by using ultrasound to pregnancy check cows at 36 to 43 days after breeding.

The dairy’s breeding protocol includes a combination of tail-chalking and synchronized A.I. breeding. Last year, they started giving a second prostaglandin shot, prior to the first service, which has yielded positive results. “That bumped our conception 5 points,” Schmidt adds. “It helps clean them up. The breeders are telling us the cows are cleaner and feel better.”

On the first three services, all cows are inseminated with sexed Jersey semen; after that, they are bred to a Limousin cross. The low market value of Jersey bull calves drove the dairy’s decision to focus on increasing the

female population. Schmidt and Fehl identify five key components to their successful reproduction program:

1. *Have the right people on the repro team.* Schmidt and Fehl agree that a successful breeding program is a direct reflection of compliance, and that's why they have assembled a team of dedicated and trustworthy individuals to handle this important job. One positive change they made was assigning one person to administer all of the gonadotropin-releasing hormone shots, as opposed to holding multiple people responsible for the task. "It's made a huge difference," Schmidt acknowledges.

"We have one person we trust doing it, and he does really well." Now, instead of employees pointing fingers and passing blame if something goes wrong, one worker is held accountable. "If it's not done, it's that one person's responsibility," Schmidt adds.

Dependable and reliable breeding technicians from the dairy's genetics company are also a valuable part of the team. They have seen better results from synchronized breedings by communicating with the breeders and making certain that insemination takes place within the correct time frame of the gonadotropin-releasing hormone shot.

The managers monitor each technician's numbers during the weekly herd checks using a code in their dairy record-keeping software.

2. *Nutrition.* The dairy made changes to the feeding program in the past year that have improved overall cow health and ultimately impacted reproduction. "We switched from a really high-concentrate diet to a forage diet," Schmidt says. "We've got a much healthier herd now." Changes made particularly to the dry cow and transition cow rations have helped fresh animals get their lactation off to a better start and, consequently, reproduction too.
3. *Hoof health.* Fehl believes a sound set of feet lays the foundation for a cow's performance. "We've got to set her up for success," he states. That means making sure each cow sees the hoof trimmer twice a year – once during the dry period and again during lactation. Heifers are trimmed prior to freshening on an as-needed basis.

All cows and heifers go through a footbath regularly, including dry cows two to three times each week. Grooved floors provide cows with traction, which is especially important because the dried manure solids used for bedding can create a slippery surface.

4. *Good facilities for handling and cooling cows.* Schmidt recognizes the importance of efficiency when working with cows, and well-designed facilities makes this attainable. Being able to move cows easily and lock and unlock them quickly during shots, tail chalking, breeding or herd checks helps to optimize the time budget for rest.

"Every extra hour of a cow sleeping is 2.5 pounds of milk," he says. Fehl adds that the goal is to not have any cow locked up for more than 40 minutes at a time. In fact, he strives for most of the cow work to be done within the 20- to 25-minute window when they are eating at the bunk after milking.

Schmidt and Fehl see the benefits of cooling as well. Tunnel ventilation effectively drops the temperature in the barns, even on the hottest days. In this environment, cows continue their normal daily activities instead of standing or clumping.

5. *Genetics.* The managers at Jerseyland Dairy believe good genetics are important, and so is a company that stands behind them with breeding technicians and technical service people. "We want a cow that is going to live for a long time and be productive," Schmidt explains.

Good feet and legs, fertility and longevity are other key traits of the kind of bulls they use, Fehl notes. "What

we want to breed are trouble-free cows,” he adds.

Though they have made significant improvements to their reproduction program in the past couple of years, Schmidt and Fehl have more goals in mind for the future. One of those is to eventually reach a 30 percent pregnancy rate.

Currently, they hover around 24 percent with only a 40-day voluntary waiting period. There are plans to add more training for the repro team through regular meetings and sharing numbers and benchmarks on a routine basis. **PD**

PHOTO: The skilled repro team at Jerseyland Dairy includes (L-R) Marlon Perez, Dr. Kayla Williams, Craig Redeker, Arturo Colorado, Kevin Fehl, Dolvin Rodriguez and Tanner Schmidt. *Photos by Peggy Coffeen.*