Reproduction takes a complete approach

Getting cows and heifers safe in calf goes far beyond semen and synchronization. Sound herd health, excellent nutrition, and dedicated teams helped these farms achieve industry-leading reproduction.

THIS year, there may be more variation in approaches to voluntary waiting period, sexed dairy and beef semen usage, strictly breeding cows from synchronization protocols versus cherry-picking, and even stocking densities among the winners of the Dairy Cattle Reproduction Council's (DCRC) annual awards competition. Despite the differences, consistencies were bountiful with accurate health records, strict adherence to protocols, over-the-top attention to fresh cows, and strong reliance on well-trained farm teams being among the core values.

In this first Hoard's Dairyman Round Table of the season, the six Platinum winning herds share their insight on reproduction. These herds sorted themselves to the top from 107 nominations — the second most to date. In the final phase of judging, a combination of statistical analysis and thorough record inspection helped the judging panel evaluate the 48 semifinalists and eventually select the top 24 herds. Throughout the entire process, judges only viewed each farm's data and did not actually learn of herd or nominator names until the final tabulations.

Of the Platinum and Gold rated herds, all but one achieved pregnancy rates over 40%. Proof that the award is judged by many more metrics, the top 10 pregnancy rate herds could be found in the Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze categories.

When do you begin breeding?

Davis Family: We begin breeding at 52 days in milk (DIM) and only after cows have had a second dose of prostaglandin. Heifers are bred at 600 pounds or 365 days of age, whichever comes first. Group weights in heifer pens help with accuracy.

Hendriks: All animals in the herd have a 55-day voluntary waiting period (VWP); we try to avoid selecting cows for earlier or later breedings just to keep our program simple. Once heifers are 11 months of age, they receive Estrumate (prostaglandin) at vet check; if no heats, they'll be put on a CIDR (progesterone) program at the next vet check two weeks later. Our goal is to have heifers in-calf twice to two different pregnancies before 24 months (still following the 55-day VWP postcalving). Heifer breeding age has been determined by size and also by analyzing age of calving versus 305-day milk.

High Noon: We set the voluntary waiting period at 79 days. This date applies to the entire dairy. As for heifers: Jersey and dairy crosses are bred at 12 months; Holsteins are bred at 13 months.

Holmesville: After calving, all of our cows are bred at 88 days even if they are first-lactation or are producing high volumes of milk. We recently raised this waiting period by 10 days to try and improve our peak milk.

For the heifers, they are bred at 14 months of age and we use sexed semen the first two breedings. If they don't conceive on the first two services with sexed semen, then we inseminate with beef semen.

Patterson: Our VWP is 70 days for all cows. There are no exceptions. It doesn't make sense for our operation to wait longer on the first-lactation cows. All that would do is make us wait longer for her peak milk when she calves for the second time.

Riverside: Our voluntary wait period for standing heats is 70 DIM. Generally, this date does not differ, but occasionally I will delay breeding by seven to 14 days if the animal suffered from a calving paralysis event or had an extended bout with ketosis.

Heifers enter the breeding pen at 12 months and begin breeding at 13 months. If a heifer has not been serviced shortly thereafter, we ultrasound and check for a corpus luteum (CL). Heifers with CLs are given prostaglandin; heifers with no structure are given gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) and a CIDR. Five days later, the CIDR is removed, prostaglandin is given, and the animal is bred in 72 hours.

Do you use presynchronization programs?

Davis Family: We administer three presynch prostaglandins before G-G-P-G (GnRH-GnRH-prostaglandin-GnRH) timed artificial insemination (TAI) for mature cows; heifers get four presynch prostaglandins. Less than 5% of heifers are bred via TAI at first breeding.

Hendriks: We set cows up a week prior to TAI with prostaglandin.

High Noon: We use a double ovsynch program on the entire milking herd.

Holmesville: We use the presynch programs and administer a first Lutalyse (prostaglandin) at 74 DIM. A second prostaglandin is given at 88 DIM, and if cows show a heat, we breed them; if not bred, we start a TAI program.

That includes a Cystorelin (GnRH) 12 days after second prostaglandin, in the morning. That is followed by prostaglandin seven days after GnRH, in the morning. We give GnRH 2-1/2 days after prostaglandin, in the afternoon, and breed the next day at midday.

Patterson: Every cow goes through the 14-14-12 presynch-ovsynch program regardless of lactation. That includes: prostaglandin at 34 to 40 DIM; prostaglandin at 48 to 54 DIM; GnRH at 60 to 66 DIM; prostaglandin at 67 to 73 DIM; GnRH at 69 to 75 DIM; and TAI at 70 to 76 DIM.

No cows are "cherry-picked" and unenrolled from the presynch-ovsynch program. That's why we can run consistently toward 60% for our first-service conception rates. This is a huge driver in our dairy's profitability. The value of a pregnancy created at 75 DIM is higher than one created at 175 DIM.

Riverside: Animals begin presynch at 29 DIM and receive two prostaglandin doses 14 days apart.

How are cows observed for heat?

Davis Family: Animals are visually observed via tail paint once daily, seven days a week. Back door TAI is used for first breeding, and back door resynch TAI is used for open cows. Conception rates based on visual heats typically run 10% to 15% higher than with TAI.

Hendriks: First heats are typically TAI, and we set up cows a week before the VWP to get them started. We rely on visual heats and TAI for breeding and do not have an activity system.

Visual heats are captured by milkers and the barn crews. When they see an animal in heat, they text

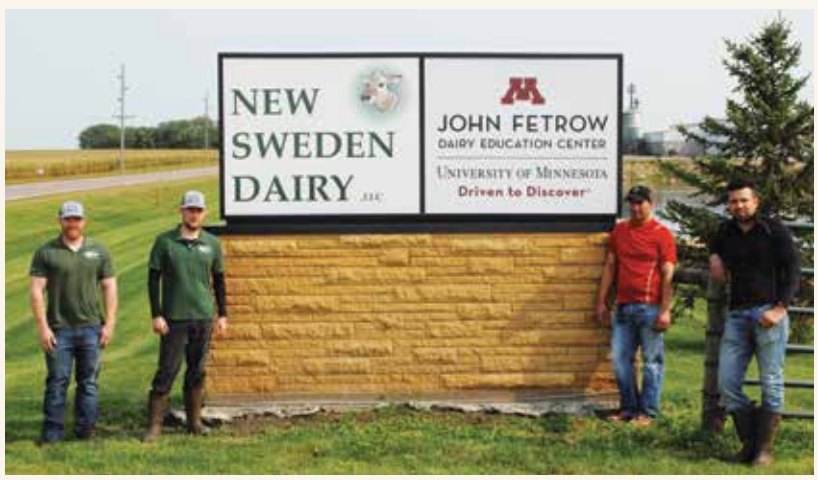

Photo by Corey Geiger

"Uterine health, udder health, and foot health all start in the rumen," explained Tom Jinkinson, D.V.M., who heads up the team at New Sweden Dairy. "Pushing for unreasonable intakes to simply raise bulk tank levels works for a very short period of time," continued the veterinarian. "Unfortunately, you cannot manage away from poor nutrition." As for the herd's performance, the Jerseys average just over 18,000 pounds of milk with a 4.9% butterfat and a 3.7% protein. The team at New Sweden Dairy achieved the top-ranked "repeat heat detection rate" in the contest, outdistancing second place by a remarkable 10% in that category. Located near Nicollet, Minn., New Sweden Dairy is part of Davis Family Dairies, which is owned by Mark, Mitch, and Marty Davis.

Photo by Jacob Lucs

"Our goal is to have heifers in-calf twice to two different pregnancies before 24 months and still follow our 55-day voluntary waiting period," explained Tyler Hendriks. The Brucefield, Ontario, farmer maintains this high bar while having the oldest herd in the contest, averaging nearly three full lactations per cow. On top of that metric, the herd exclusively uses sexed semen. "Our farm hasn't used any conventional dairy semen for over three years, and we haven't seen a conception difference," added Tyler. Hendriks Dairies is owned by parents Henry and Patti, along with Emily and Tyler Hendriks, all shown above. Emily is holding daughter Ada, while Tyler is holding son Liam. The 100 Jersey cows average 22,000 pounds of milk with a 4.9% butterfat and a 3.8% protein.

Backed by the lowest culling rate and overall best heat detection rate, High Noon Dairy in Hereford, Texas, caught the eye of the judges in this year's DCRC competition by topping two categories. The farm is also focused on genetic progress. "We use 100% sexed semen for first, second, and third service on first-lactation animals," said farm manager Jody Cole. "We also use 100% sexed semen on the first and second services on the heifers. Beef semen is used on all second-lactation and greater animals." Shown above is the High Noon Dairy Farm team (L to R): Rene Tzoc Suar, Ricardo Apolinar Apolinar, Santos Gutierrex Toj, Jose Ledezma, Jody Cole, Jesos Ledczma, Pedro Bellido, Jose Riz, Roberto Gomez Grave, and Eliseo Gomez. The farm, located in the Texas Panhandle, is owned by Pete and Dana Bouma and Jim and Katie DiGangi.

Photo by Corey Geiger

The contest's longest voluntary waiting period and chart-topping conception rate on the second service helped propel Holmesville Dairy to the winner's circle. "We recently raised this voluntary waiting period by 10 days to try and improve our peak milk," said Travis Holmes of his Holstein herd that averages 27,800 M, 1,025 F, and 829 P. Holmes was able to extend that waiting period due to the herd's impeccable ability to get cows safe in calf. Shown above are the Argyle, Wis., dairy team (L to R): standing, Mike Van Schyndle and John Wienkes, both with Spensley Feed Sales; B.J. Jones, D.V.M., Center Hill Veterinary Clinic; Stephanie and Travis Holmes; Maureen Thompson, Holmesville Dairy calf feeder; Tim Heiring, A.I. technician; and Cody James, Holmesville Dairy employee; seated on tractor, Claire, Hunter, and Riley Holmes with grandfather Tim Holmes on the tractor seat.

Photo by Corey Geiger

the tag numbers. Tyler follows up by checking days since last heat (DSLH) and do not breed (DNB) lists and then confirms the visual observations. Our TAI conception is 58% and natural conception is 52%.

High Noon: All milk pens are chalked daily. We start heat detection once cows leave the fresh pens. No breeding will occur until the week of timed A.I.

Holmesville: Our A.I. technician, Tim Heiring, walks through the cows every day while they are locked in headlocks. We use Mark-Her livestock marking paint to help determine who is in heat. If tail paint is gone, then the breeder will breed that cow. The heifers are bred at outside headlocks and walked daily. Estrotect breeding indicator patches are used for heat detection in the virgin heifers.

Conception rates in cows for presynch-ovsynch run 57%; cherry-picked second prostaglandin, 58%; ovsynch after herd check, 48%; standing heat, 45%; and tail paint, 54%. Our overall conception rate is 53%.

Patterson: All cows have AFI transponders to gather daily milk weights. We also utilize the AFI system for heat detection after an animal's first-service insemination. We have no one doing visual heat detection on the farm.

Riverside: All animals are tail painted daily. Visual inspection for heats and bleed-offs, as well as cloudy or dirty discharge, are done in the morning by myself (Andy) and also by Scott Woepse and Bryce Fischer, our A.I. technicians. We talk most days, but also communicate via text message and a dry-erase board located outside the breeding pen. Cows are added to the vet check list when days appear off-cycle or when they show heat several days early while enrolled in a synch program.

It is difficult to let a heat pass without insemination, but it is far more important to delay the breeding, ultrasound, diagnose the issue, and restart the cow on a program. Otherwise, these animals will struggle to make it to a vet check, wasting both valuable time and money. I appreciate when my employees alert me of a silent heat by sending me a text message from the parlor that a cow in the breeding pen won't let its milk down.

Do you a synchronization program?

Davis Family: We give as few injections as possible. We rely on physical and metabolic health and a good environment (comfortable beds, fresh air, and heat abatement) to allow cows to express natural heats, assisted with prostaglandin.

Hendriks: Most of our synch programs are ovsynch. But we will adjust programs if there is a strong heat before VWP to make TAI more effective. Our biggest improvement has been administering a second prostaglandin dose 24 hours after the first one. This program has given us almost 15% higher conception in our synch results.

High Noon: On our heifers, we run a simple double Lutalyse program. We pushed out the ages on the Jerseys to breed them at 12 months, and it seems to have made a big difference. For the crosses, it seems to give them a little more time to grow. Previously, we had been breeding each group earlier.

Holmesville: All cows are ultrasounded at 32 and 55 days after breeding by our veterinarian, B.J. Jones. If they are open and have a CL, they are resynchronized with an ovsynch, where we give GnRH on the day the vet checks; prostaglandin seven days later; GnRH 2-1/2 days after the prostaglandin; then breed the next day. If the cow is open with no CL, we give GnRH and recheck for a CL the next week at herd check at which time the cow will be ovsynched.

If our heifers are not bred by 15 months, we will ultrasound them. Heifers with CLs are given Lutalyse, while heifers with no structure are given Cystorelin and checked in one week for a CL.

We have been very happy with our conception rates and pregnancy rates with this system. Overall herd pregnancy rate is 40%, heat detection rate is 76%, and a conception rate of 53%.

Patterson: Every cow goes through the 14-day prostaglandin, 14-day prostaglandin, and 12-day GnRH presynch-ovsynch program, regardless of lactation. We have been doing this for several years.

Riverside: Lactating cows are bred on a 10-day ovsynch program. GnRH is given Tuesday morning; the first prostaglandin is given the following Tuesday morning; a second prostaglandin is given 24 hours after; GnRH is given 55 hours after the prostaglandin; and insemination occurs Friday at 7 a.m. We added the second prostaglandin a few years ago but excluded first-lactation cows because we didn't see improved conception rates to justify the cost.

How do you deal with problem cows?

Davis Family: Problem breeders are synchronized and bred to beef semen. We have both a production and DIM cutoff that varies slightly by season and calving pressure.

Hendriks: Higher index milking females and all heifers will be bred up to five times to sexed semen before a final breeding to beef. Cows are bred until 180 DIM, with their last breeding before this being to beef.

High Noon: We attempt to breed cows six times minimum. We will go up to eight services if body condition is good and milk production is holding steady. The weather plays a big part as well.

Holmesville: If a cow is having trouble with getting pregnant and is found open at vet check, we will then use the ovsynch programs. Once a cow is over 200 DIM or under 75 pounds of milk and open, we do not breed it if the ovsynch has not worked.

Patterson: If there is a problem cow or a cystic cow, we will use an occasional CIDR, but less than 2% of our services are with the aid of a CIDR.

We don't have a specific production level or days open that we use to stop breeding an animal. Every cow is different, so every decision is on a cow-by-cow basis depending on its potential profitability. We probably should be more aggressive putting cows on the DNB list.

Riverside: On high-producing cows, we use a G-G-P-G synchronization protocol to ensure a fresh start and a ripe CL. For cystic cows, the same program is used but with a CIDR. Following the second GnRH (Week 3), and prior to pulling the CIDR and giving prostaglandin, the cow is ultrasounded for a CL. If no CL is present, the CIDR remains in and GnRH is given until a CL is formed.

In some rare cases, this has taken a few weeks. Due to overcrowding and culling purposes, I place the cow on the DNB list after the fifth service. Cows are culled once fat-corrected milk production falls below 80 pounds.

Do you use sexed semen?

Davis Family: We only use sex-sorted Jersey semen and conventional beef semen. We have an internal herd ranking and use a calving projection model to determine the proportion of cows that are bred to each type of semen.

Hendriks: We use 95% sexed semen and 5% Black Angus across the board on our herd. We make a lot of replacements, but we have a strong heifer market and pair that with an aggressive culling program. Once our herd production goals are met, we will assess how much beef versus sexed semen we will use on cows. Our farm hasn't used any conventional semen for over three years, and we haven't seen a conception difference in semen.

Most animals are bred up to five times, with that fifth breeding being to beef semen. Cows that are

on all beef semen programs are enrolled based on peak milk versus herd. Cows also need to have had a good transition period, have a low somatic cell count (SCC), and be problem-free. If not, we will add them to the DNB list and replace the cow with a heifer once its lactation curve falls too low.

High Noon: We use 100% sexed semen for first, second, and third services on the first-lactation animals. First-lactation animals are bred to sexed Jersey or Holstein semen based on matings. We also use 100% sexed semen on the first and second services on the heifers. Sexed beef semen is used on all second-lactation and greater animals.

Holmesville: For our heifers, we will use 90% sexed semen on the first two services; after those matings, we use beef semen. Conception rates run at 52% for sexed semen and 60% for conventional semen in heifers. We have not been using sexed semen in the cows, but we have started to implement beef semen after the first two services.

Historically, we have produced excess heifers, which have been raised and sold for dairy purposes. As this market has dried up, we are using more beef semen to capitalize on better prices for our calves and to reduce replacement numbers. First-lactation cows are getting bred two times to top-end conventional Holstein bulls, and after second service they are bred to beef. All second and later lactation cows are bred to beef. These days, 50% of the breedings to lactating cows are to beef.

Patterson: Genetics are extremely important to us. We want to create the most efficient and profitable herd possible. Part of the icing on the cake with an efficient reproduction program is that we get to create herd replacements from the animals we actually want.

Every Holstein heifer calf that gets put into a hutch is genomic tested. We are now raising animals that are the second generation to be genomic tested. We have built sampling and sending genomic samples into our weekly task schedule, just like dry-off, vaccinations, and hoof trimming routines. Every Friday morning, the genomic tissue sampling unit (TSU) samples for the females born on the farm for the last week are submitted for testing.

The goal is that any calf that does not meet our genetic standards be culled by 4 weeks of age. We want to minimize the amount of time and input costs related to raising a replacement that doesn't fit our parameters. Even when using the highest sires on the highest dams, there is still a bell curve, and we are continually raising our genetic thresholds.

Our highest genetic virgin heifers are serviced to the highest possible Dairy Wellness Profit (DWP$) and Net Merit (NM$) sexed semen sires available. The lowest-end heifers are serviced to beef. If the heifer is not pregnant after two services to sexed semen, it will then be serviced with conventional Holstein semen.

The highest genetic animals in the lactating herd will also get sexed semen. Depending on the value of the animal, it may get serviced two times with sexed semen before getting conventional. However, the majority of the lactating cows are serviced to beef.

As for the numbers . . . 2020 conception rates for sexed semen used on cows is 55%, beef is 57%, and conventional Holstein semen is the lowest at 54%. Heifer sexed semen conception rate stands at 65% and for conventional semen it is 80%.

Riverside: For heifers, sexed semen is used on the first two services, then conventional beef semen. All first-lactation cows and the top 25% of second-lactation cows are bred to sexed semen. The remaining 75% second-lactation and older are bred to beef. This revamped genetic strategy was brought on by the decreasing market demand for dairy replacements. Historically, 40 to 50 cows were sold annually for dairy to neighboring farms. This new strategy also allows us to capitalize on higher prices for our bull calves and reduces heifer feed and labor costs.

Describe pregnant and open checks.

Davis Family: We ultrasound at 28 to 34 days since last heat (DSLH). Open cows are checked for CLs. Those cows with a CL under 30 millimeters (mm) receive GnRH, while cows with a CL over 30 mm receive prostaglandin. Cows are then enrolled in the G-G-P-G program if they are not bred off of the aforementioned protocol.

Hendriks: All preg checks are done by our veterinarian, Christie Whytock, via ultrasound. Vet checks are done every other Tuesday, which is when we start our synch programs to keep things simple. Cows and heifers are checked at 27 days or later postbreeding and rechecked at 60 days. Since we use nearly 95% sexed semen, we don't sex pregnancies via ultrasound.

High Noon: We work closely with Fabin Teixeira, D.V.M., from Progressive Health Services out of Clovis, N.M.

All animals are checked with an ultrasound at 32 DSLH. With an ultrasound, we can better determine the pregnancy, health of the embryo, and if open, which route to take to get semen back into the animal in the most timely fashion.

Holmesville: For pregnancy checking we have our veterinarian, B.J. Jones, ultrasound them once a week on Tuesdays. We ultrasound cows at 32 days after breeding to determine if they are pregnant or open. Pregnant cows are rechecked at Day 55 to confirm the pregnancy and also check for twins and the fetal sex. The heifer groups are also checked weekly at the same intervals.

Patterson: Like all the inseminations, our pregnancy checks are also done in-house. We use the Easi-Scan ultrasound unit with the BUG goggles available from IMV imaging. Both cow and heifer pregnancy checks are done weekly, every Tuesday morning. This is coordinated with our synchronization day and our Friday morning synch breeding schedule.

The first checks are done between 32 to 38 DSLH. Any cows confirmed open receive Cystorelin. That way they are automatically enrolled in the resynch program. If the cow is cystic, she will get a CIDR the following day. She may also get a CIDR if she is over 150 DIM and not confirmed pregnant. A second pregnancy check is done between 61 to 67 DCC. The predry confirmation is at 180 DCC. Heifers are checked at 28 to 34 DSLH, with a reconfirmation at 60 to 66 DCC.

Riverside: Cows and heifers are ultrasounded between 29 to 32 DSLH. If pregnant, ultrasound occurs again at 59 to 62 DCC and again at 180 DCC before dry-off. Ultrasound helps identify twinning, as those cows are dried off earlier. I also put a "G" on their back in the prefresh pen, which stands for "gemelos" (Spanish word for twins), so I know to check for a second calf and my employees are aware to return her to maternity for 24 hours postcalving.

What metrics do you monitor?

Davis Family: We monitor both biweekly and monthly preg rates. We also monitor sire conception rate on a weekly basis, as sexed semen necessitates promptly removing bulls that don't sort well. Another number we track is percent pregnant at palpation . . . admittedly, it's not an awesome metric but provides quick feedback to breeders on last week's heat detection for bred cows.

By tracking percent first insemination via TAI, we can evaluate heat detection, but more importantly, we can track transition cow issues that may have occurred 40 to 60 days ago.

In heifers, we look at age at first breeding over

Photo by Abigail Cox

Consistent — that describes both the reproduction metrics and overall approach to breeding cows at Patterson Farms in Auburn, N.Y. "No cows are 'cherry-picked' and un-enrolled from the presynch-ovsynch program," said dairy manager Paul Colgan. "That's why we can run consistently toward 60% for our first-service conception rates. This is a huge driver on our dairy. The value of a pregnancy created at 75 days in milk (DIM) is higher than the one created at 175 DIM," Colgan went on to say of the Holstein herd that averages 28,167 M, 1,083 F, and 866 P. Shown above are (L to R): Paul, Jody, Sarah, and Elizabeth Colgan; and Riley, Julie, and Jon Patterson. Missing from the photo are Rebecca Colgan and Wyatt and Tad Patterson.

Photo by Corey Geiger

Innovative would be among the words to describe the Riverside Dairy team that ranked among the top five for both pregnancy and conception rates. Cows diagnosed with twins receive a "G" on their back upon entering the prefresh pen. That "G" stands for gemelos, the Spanish word for twins, and it sets off a stepped up set of protocols. "We also feed two bags of corn silage at a time," said Andy Fisher. "We feel this gives us less chance of forage change." Members of the farm team include (L to R): Joe Herring, D.V.M., of Veterinary Associates; Austin Fisher; Scott Woepse, CentralStar A.I. technician; Andy Fisher; Todd LeNoble, Badgerland Nutrition; Tom Tienor; Lauryn Krentz, Vita Plus; Cole Fisher; and Angie Ulness, Parnell. Fisher and Tienor own the Reedsville, Wis., dairy. Missing from the photo is Bryce Fischer, CentralStar A.I. technician.

time. This allows us to evaluate flow through the heifer yard on a weekly, biweekly, and monthly basis. This metric also allows us to monitor theoretical heifer growth and if movements are regular.

Hendriks: Key metrics we look at are: preg rate, average days open, breeding code (who bred and what caused the breeding), and number of times bred. We try to be patient when looking for trends based on our herd size, but we look at these metrics weekly to raise awareness.

High Noon: I think we monitor all the same metrics that every dairy does. We are looking at preg rates, conception rates, heat detection, protocol compliance, sire conception, and so forth.

We look at these metrics weekly after each preg check, and results are sent to each team member to keep everyone focused and involved. The heifers are monitored the same way.

Holmesville: We watch pregnancy rates on a regular basis. On a weekly basis, we also monitor our palpation rates for pregnancy as that is usually the first indicator if breeding isn't going well. We have quarterly team meetings where our consultant, Rod Wautlet, and our veterinarian, B.J. Jones, will thoroughly evaluate our conception rates in both heifers and cows.

Patterson: Our top metric is palpated pregnancy rate of the herd check for first-time pregnancies. We really like to see palpated pregnancy rate above 80%, but the goal is greater than 75% for cows. Meanwhile, greater than 95% for heifers is our standard. We look at this in both cows and heifers each week.

Conception rates (CR) and service rates (SR) also garner our attention each week. In the milking herd, our goals include a CR greater than 55% and an SR over 70%. For heifers, those numbers climb to greater than 65% CR and greater than 75% SR. Our goals for pregnancy rates are over 40% for cows and 48% for heifers. We track three preg rate metrics to monitor trends — over three months, over six months, and over the year.

Riverside: We observe all of the following criteria on a daily or weekly basis:

- Percent pregnant at herd check.
- Number of cystic ovaries, if any.
- Early aborts; 60 DCC losses.
- Feed intakes and refusals.
- Production and components, MUN levels.
- Fresh cow care and health-related metrics.

How might you improve reproduction?

Davis Family: The continued development of activity monitoring devices is interesting. However, the economics of those devices currently do not pencil out for us. Once competition in this segment increases and the technology becomes more mainstream, we see the price coming down to a level that we would strongly consider it

Hendriks: Our farm doesn't use any technologies other than Dairy Comp 305 and parlor weights, so the list of things to add is endless. Justifying their effectiveness is what we struggle with on our farm based on our repro success and herd size.

We do look forward to getting into an activity system in the near future that can offer us rumination, too. Identifying sick cows before the visual symptoms or milk drop in the parlor would be a huge push forward for us.

High Noon: Our reproduction performance has opened the door to looking at embryo work in both the dairy or beef markets. We also will continually look at ovsynch and resynch programs to see how we can change timing or make the protocols more cost-effective.

Holmesville: As breeding has been going really well at the farm, we usually have extra heifers to sell as springers. With the lower milk price, this market has not been as financially fruitful as in years past. Due to this evolving situation, we have been using more beef semen in the cows and are trying to evaluate how much beef semen we want to use in the future.

Some things we have done to help us improve pregnancy rates over the last few years include raising our VWP. With improved fertility, we have found we don't have to breed the cows as early, and it gives them more time to peak production. We also have added a second prostaglandin into our ovsynch cows and feel this has helped improve conception rates.

Patterson: The pregnancy rate is currently over 41% and has been over 40% for the past 2-1/2 years. We do not have plans to change the reproductive plan.

Riverside: Converting the barns from mechanical to tunnel ventilation would be a significant change. We do see a slight dip in pregnancy rate during the summer months. Increased wind speed supplied by tunnel ventilation would mean fewer flies, less bunching, and ultimately getting the cows to spread out. Using the outside row of stalls would lead to less lameness.

What insights do you have for others?

Davis Family: Look at nutrition first. If you have over a 1% displaced abomasum (DA) rate, deal with hemorrhagic bowel syndrome, or have a high rate of sole ulcers, chances are you can bump up reproduction quickly by fixing your nutrition program. The injection-intense reproduction programs can overcome some of these nutrition issues but only operate as a Band-Aid on a gash in our experience.

Hendriks: My advice for producers looking to improve their herd repro is to code breedings as there is no such thing as too much information. This will make troubleshooting much easier when a problem does arise. There is no worse feeling than seeing a big slip in preg rate and not knowing what or where your problem is on the farm.

High Noon: Overtrain employees. Use your local services, veterinarians, animal health companies such as Zoetis, and the like to pull information to educate and motivate your staff. Assemble teams that work well together — fresh cows, veterinary care crews, maternity, and feeders. Make sure communication is open between everyone, and show them how they impact each other.

Holmesville: Use all the resource people you can to maximize your herd fertility. We feel the breeding is a result of a total team approach from the employees, nutritionists, veterinarian, and breeders. Quarterly team meetings have helped keep our group on the same page. Everyone needs to be a team to have a successful breeding program.

Patterson: No matter what area you want to improve on the dairy, or in life, find someone who is achieving the results you want to achieve, ask them for assistance, and utilize their experience and knowledge. Ask them for an honest assessment to find out what are your areas of opportunity. Once that is done, develop a strategy to accomplish the goals you set. The next step is one that several people miss — execution. Don't just talk about what you want to see happen, follow through and execute the plan.

There are so many great approaches . . . synchronization programs, technology, and cow management systems . . . to use to successfully get cows pregnant. Pick something that fits the management strategy of your operation. Whatever technology, program, or protocol the dairy decides to utilize, the key is going to be in the consistency. The thing to remember is you need to do the same thing, the same way, the same time, every time.

Riverside: Consistency. As we all know, cows are creatures of habit and like their day to be the same way, every day. Strive to provide an environment that gives them every opportunity to become pregnant and maintain that pregnancy.

Choose your resources wisely. You can tell when a person is passionate with their job. It works both ways. The nutritionist, breeder, veterinarian, and employees will work hard for you when they see your drive and dedication to the farm. Don't be quick to point the finger when things slide in the wrong direction; rather, work together as a team on how to move forward.

PLATINUM WINNERS

Recipient	Nominator
Davis Family Dairies, Tom Jinkinson, farm manager, Nicollet, Minn.	Brandon Thesing, Select Sires
Hendriks Dairies, Henry and Tyler Hendriks, Brucefield, Ontario, Canada	Gary Markus, Alta Genetics
High Noon Dairy, Jody Cole, farm manager, Hereford, Texas	Fabio Horacio Schneider Teixeira, Progressive Dairy Health Services, and Kim Egan, Genex
Holmesville Dairy, Tim and Travis Holmes, Argyle, Wis.	B.J. Jones, D.V.M., Center Hill Veterinary Clinic
Patterson Farms, Jon and Julie Patterson and Dan Young, Auburn, N.Y.	Claire Mulligan, ABS Global
Riverside Dairy, Andy Fisher and Tom and Jean Tienor, Reedsville, Wis.	Angie Ulness, Parnell Living Science

GOLD WINNERS

Recipient	Nominator
Drumgoon Dairy, Rodney and Dorothy Elliott, Lake Norden, S.D.	Jon Holewinski, Alta Genetics
Lake Breeze Dairy, Breeze Dairy Group, Malone, Wis.	Jon Holewinski, Alta Genetics
Maple Leaf Dairy, Kristin Leiteritz, Cleveland, Wis.	David Baemmert, D.V.M., Kiel Veterinary Clinic
Schilling Farms, Schilling Family, Darlington, Wis.	B.J. Jones, D.V.M., Center Hill Veterinary Clinic
Truttmann Farm, Dan Truttmann, Blanchardville, Wis.	Kris Gruenenfelder, Parnell Living Science
Verhoef Dairy Farm, Reinoud and Klaartje Verhoef, Belmont, Ontario, Canada	Ian VandenBerg, Genex, and Matt Stoop, Alta Genetics

SILVER WINNERS

Recipient	Nominator
Emerald Dairy, Darrin Young, Plainview, Minn.	Brandon Thesing, Select Sires
Jauquet Hillview Dairy, Dave and Stacy Jauquet, Luxemberg, Wis.	Jeffrey Lutz, Genex
KC Dairies, Edward Kavanaugh, Elkton, S.D.	Corey Caraway, Zoetis
Scholze Family Farms, Theo and Will Scholze, Humbird, Wis.	Adam Koppes, Genex
Spring Breeze Dairy, Breeze Dairy Group, Bryant, Wis.	Derek Kolpack, Genex
VanBedaf Dairy, VanBedaf Family, Efren Pineda, herd manager, Carrington, N.D.	Shane Boettcher, Select Sires

BRONZE WINNERS

Recipient	Nominator
Dairi-Acres Farms, Dean and Amy Bryant, Strathroy, Ontario, Canada	Gary Markus, Alta Genetics
Davis Family Farm, Jayme and Brad Davis, Darlington, Wis.	B.J. Jones, D.V.M., Center Hill Veterinary Clinic
Newmont Dairy Farm, Gladstone Family, Bradford, Vt.	Seth Carpenter, STgenetics
Quarry Hill Dairy, John and Connie Meyer, Rollingstone, Minn.	Brandon Thesing, Select Sires
Rock River Jerseys, Brett Kirkley, Inwood, Iowa	Jon Holewinski, Alta Genetics
Ruedinger Farms, John Ruedinger and Dave Zappa, VanDyne, Wis.	Jeannie Bishop, Merck Animal Health, and Kim Egan, Genex