Perspectives of the 20-Year Climb
Jeff Opitz
Opitz Dairy Farms
Saukville, WI

Opitz Dairy Farms
• 1,075-cow dairy
  – 950 milk cows
  – 1,100 head of young stock
• 17 full-time employees
• 925 acres
  – Additional custom-raised forages
• February 2014
  – 100% bull-bred to 100% AI bred
  – Embraced technology
  – Incorporated sexed semen for virgin heifers
Sand Bedding & Cow Comfort

Feed Access 24/7

10:00 AM
My 20-Year Perspective

1. Hand-held phone & data availability
   - Her whole life in your hand
   - Quick access to information
   - Can make good decisions quickly

2. Activity & rumination monitors
   - Activity monitors
     - Breeding efficiency
     - Activity & rumination go hand-in-hand as far as the intensity of the heat – to breed or not to breed
     - Catches later-lactation cows that have absorbed calf
     - Adjusted vaccination protocols to more strategic times
My 20-Year Perspective

2. Activity & rumination monitors

- Rumination monitors
  - Used on both lactating and prefresh cows
  - Each cow is her own benchmark
  - When flagged, can deal with them quickly
  - Allows us to measure if treatment is working
  - Allows precision treatment:
    
    ![Diagram](image)

- Flags off-feed cows for early intervention
- Takes stress off milkers to find problem cows
- Low tolerance for sore feet
  - Activity drops
- Helps you dot your I’s and cross your T’s!
My 20-Year Perspective

3. Forage & feeding management
   • Huge strides in precision feeding
   • Harvest efficiency - hay in a day
   • Better corn silage genetics

Looking Ahead

• Mid-sized dairies
  • More vertically integrated to tolerate the up’s and down’s
• 3,500 – 4,000 cow dairies
  • Hard to ignore due to high milking efficiencies
• Labor issues
  • Where do robots fit?
  • Robots on big rotary parlors?
• Water recycling system for manure
  • Move half of the manure volume
  • Cost?
Thank You!

Dairy Summit 2014

The 20-Year Climb • December 10 & 11 • Red Wing, Minnesota • dairyperformance.vitaplus.com
Perspectives of the 20-Year Climb

Blake Heller
Heller Farm Inc.
Alma, Wis.

Heller Farm

- 1,250-cow dairy
  - 1,100 milk cows
  - 1,100 head of young stock
- 35 employees, including family members
- 4,200 acres
- 2013
  - Manure digester
  - Separated solids for bedding
  - Emphasis on cow comfort
My 20-Year Perspective

1. Empowerment of the people that work on our dairy
   - Teaching Hispanic workers important on-farm tasks
   - Never would have envisioned this in 1994
   - DA surgeries, preg checks, treatment protocols, etc.

2. Cowz R Us Consulting
   - Source and train Hispanic workers for dairies
   - Create organizational flowcharts to maximize worker efficiency
   - Provide expanding dairies labor needs and costs
   - Didn’t see this coming!

3. “My way or the wrong way”
   - Empowering & entrusting employees
   - Not command/control
Looking Ahead

• It is going to be all about the people managing the dairies
• Technology will continue at warp speed
• Highly motivated employees that share your same goals and values
• Continue to become more efficient and keep getting better
• Size of Midwestern dairies?

Thank You!
Perspectives of the 20-Year Climb

Tom McClellan
McClellan Farms, Inc.
Delavan, WI

McClellan Farms, Inc.

- Originated in 1926
- Today in 2014
  - Partners: Tom & June McClellan & Wes Hopkins
  - 550-cow dairy (475 milk cows)
  - 15 full-time employees
  - 3x milking
  - 3,000 acres (80% rented)
  - Custom harvesting business
McClellan Farms, Inc.

• **1994-1995:**
  – 140 milk cows
  – Added 3-row barn
  – Early adoption of sand bedding

• **1999:**
  – Added a 6-row barn
  – Up to 400 milk cows

• **2007:**
  – Added 2-row barn for fresh cows
  – Up to 450 milk cows

• **2012:**
  – Added transition barn for prefresh & hospital cows
  – Up to 475 milk cows

• **Tried to do a better job at each expansion by adapting the new research and technology available**
My 20-Year Perspective

1. Tremendous strides in cow comfort, incorporating sand bedding & curtain side walls
   • Allowed 100-plus lb milk average to be achieved
   • Important “to let cows be cows”
   – 3-legged stool:
     • Genetics – Nutrition – Cow Comfort

2. Management and inoculant technology in preserving feed
   – Sick of baling hay 20 years ago
   – Transitioned out of uprights and into bunkers as our herd size increased
   – Didn’t see this coming in 1994:
     • Plastic on side walls
     • New inoculant technology
     • New plastic cover technology
     • New processing technology
My 20-Year Perspective

2. Management and inoculant technology in preserving feed:
   • Still looking for the holy grail of bunker covers
   • Need a product that can be conveniently and efficiently sprayed on bunkers

My 20-Year Perspective

3. Nutrition & management tools
   – Anions for dry cows
   – Reproductive management protocols
   – Tremendous tools to improve transition health and reproductive efficiency
Looking Ahead

• **Technology – Technology – Technology**
  – Robotic milking
  – Robotic tractors - paired up with the combine
  – Precision farming & GPS technology
  – Cow-specific technologies:
    • Activity monitors
    • Rumination monitors
    • Real-time NIR milk analysis
      – Heat detect from the milk progesterone analysis
      – Ketosis treatment from the milk BHA analysis

Looking Ahead

• **Technology – Technology – Technology**
  – Data management and interpretation will be the challenge
  – With all of this data management work, we will now need to go to the health club because we are sitting on our butts
Final Thoughts