



Dairy Issue Briefs

DIBS



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Plummeting prices in the dairy industry are creating critical cash-flow and long-term survivability issues on Ohio's 3,328 dairy farms. Cost-cutting decisions must be made with full awareness of both short and long-term production and economic consequences. OSU Extension's Dairy Working Group, a collaboration of OSU Extension Educators and Specialists discuss:

Reducing costs to improve short term cash flow

Breeding programs: Natural service or AI?

Successful reproductive and nutrition programs combined with excellent management strategies (e.g. personnel) and post-partum programs enhance dairy herd profitability. Regardless of the reproductive strategy used on-farm, getting lactating cows and heifers pregnant in a timely manner must be the main goal of any reproductive program.

Although a number of dairies use natural service (NS) as a way to get cows pregnant, there are some economic (e.g. feed, management, etc.) and health (e.g. soundness) considerations to be taken into account (in addition to genetic progress). The most common reason for using NS is prior unsuccessful AI attempts. The general belief is that a bull does a better job getting dairy cows pregnant. In some dairy herds with poor heat detection programs, the use of NS is a viable alternative. If you are using NS as a breeding practice, the assessment of the breeding potential of bulls through a breeding soundness evaluation (BSE) is recommended. Avoid the use of unsound bulls; these are very costly (e.g. poor pregnancy rates). Perform a BSE on all bulls at least every 6 months, and use 14-20 days of bull exposure to cows followed by 14 days of resting (bull:cow ratio of 1:20).

Despite the similar reproductive performances between AI and NS, a recent study showed that NS breeding programs are more expensive than timed-AI when direct and indirect costs are considered. Without accounting for less genetic progress, the NS program would cost \$27 more per cow/year than a timed-AI program. Therefore, before making any changes to your reproductive program, consult your veterinarian for more information.



Bottom Line: Before switching to NS, consider the feed costs and management compliance of having a bull on-farm. Also, consider human-safety issues associated with handling mature bulls on-farm.

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