

A REPRODUCTIVE MOMENT WITH MEL

By Mel DeJarnette, reproductive specialist

TEAMWORK

These days it seems that everyone is talking about "teamwork." During the last six months, nearly every major publication targeting dairy producers has had an article on team approaches to dairy herd management. There are many reasons that the team approach to dairying is an excellent idea and long overdue in implementation.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

A major reason for this change in philosophy is size. Grandpa never needed help, but grandpa never milked more than 60 cows at once. To be efficient and profitable in today's large herds, the herd manager routinely must make four- and five-digit dollar-value decisions (or more) in areas ranging from milking management, reproduction and cow health, to tax laws, financing issues, environmental impact and milk marketing. No one can be expected to know it all. That's why the team (or two heads are better than one) approach has grown so much in popularity.

However, before starting to pull together people for your team, it's important to know what you want and expect from your team, and how to make sure it is successful.

TEAMWORK DEFINED

In preparing to write this, I looked up the definition of teamwork in Webster's dictionary. I thought I knew what teamwork is. But, after reading the definition, I think I understand why many teams have failed to produce substantial positive results. They never really understood the meaning of teamwork. Webster defines team-

work as a "joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of group."

Wow, did you catch that? This phrase is worth repeating: "subordinates his individual interests and opinions." All too often participants come to team meetings to confidently, loudly voice their interests and opinions, and to prevent others from "blaming" them for problems.

THE BLAME GAME

At the recent Select Sires national sales conference, Dr. Phil Senger of Washington State University referred to this as "The Blame Game." Most dairymen have witnessed or perhaps been participants in this game. The veterinarian may blame the nutritionist, who may blame the A.I. representative who may blame bovine somatotropin (bST) and so on. The herd owner, confused and not knowing whom to believe, blames all of the above.

Team approaches are designed to get people on the same page and eliminate the blame game. However, if participants don't come to the meeting with the right attitude, it can turn out to be a good place to play the blame game face-to-face. If you need bouncers at your team meetings, then your team members haven't quite figured out what it's all about.

In everyone's defense, teamwork does not come easily. It's human nature to exhibit a little "turf-protection" and be somewhat defensive when challenged. It's much easier when everyone agrees it's someone else's fault, leaving us

alone. However, this attitude can railroad a team effort in short order.

For team efforts to be successful, members must be able to put aside their personal agenda and focus on solving the problems. Good team members diplomatically suggest changes without giving the appearance of finger-pointing or laying blame. Likewise, good team members will have thick-enough skin to accept criticism where warranted without being offended. What each team member needs to remember is that it's all or none for everyone; either everyone wins or no one wins.

THE TEAM CAPTAIN

What each herd-owner also must remember is that he/she is an important member of the team and, like it or not, must shoulder the responsibility of being team captain. One of the captain's most important responsibilities is to establish an environment that helps put team members at ease.

As with other team members, the captain must be prepared to accept criticism. It certainly would be nice if your team meeting ended with others accepting full responsibility for problems and agreeing to solve them. However, we all know that's not likely and, in reality, most recommendations will touch a little close to home for the captain. But that's OK. Let the chips fall where they may. The captain will reap the benefits of all solutions implemented.

Additionally, among team members there may be conflicts or differing opinions about problem identification and/or courses of action. As captain, you must be



prepared to step to the plate, make a decision, call the shots and accept the consequences.

Another important term in the teamwork definition is "action." Action is totally in the hands of the team captain and, unfortunately, often is the most frustrating part of the solution. An advantage of the team effort is that once all team members agree on the problem and the appropriate course of action, each member independently can check progress of implementation during routine visits. Through repetition of the same message coming from multiple sources, the value of action eventually is driven home.

CREATING A TEAM

Who should be involved in the reproductive-solutions team? Obviously, the veterinarian is important, as is the nutritionist. Since team recommendations require implementation, make sure the employees and herd manager are represented. If recommendations require sizable financial investment, your accountant and/or banker should be invited to the table. Local extension and university personnel can be valuable assets. And, don't forget to include your Select Sires reproductive-solutions specialist. There is one in your area, no matter where you are.

As reproduction has become ever more important to producers, it also has become critical to Select Sires' customer service. That's why Select Sires initiated a reproductive-certification program for its salesforce in 1999. In addition to providing the latest research about reproduction and reproductive management, we began testing employees' skills and abilities to apply this knowledge when trouble-shooting. The "learning experience," as we call it, challenges participants to understand

CONCEPTION INFLUENCED MOST BY MANAGEMENT, ENVIRONMENT

Recent research documents what most producers have suspected. That is that environment and management are the primary factors affecting conception rates (see figure 1).

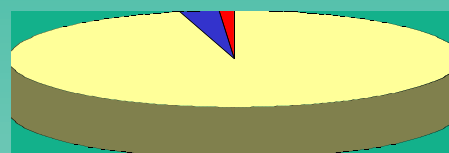
That's why in an article in the October 2001 *Holstein World*, Dr. Kent Weigel, genetics specialist from the University of Wisconsin, reminded dairy producers to keep fertility measures and information in the proper perspective.

"Conception rates are a problem on many farms, and this trait has a high economic value," Weigel said. "But reliability of male and (especially) female fertility evaluations will be low, and we can't forget about the other traits that pay the bills, like milk, protein, udders, feet and legs, somatic cell scores, and productive life."

When primary selection traits between bulls are equal, then looking at fertility measures is a small detail that may help gain a percentage or two in conception rate, advises Mel DeJarnette. In these situations, producers can trust the SUPERIOR SETTLER™ designation - a mark of higher fertility given only to sires that excel in both laboratory analysis and field-based non-return data - as a reliable secondary selection criterion. ♦

basic reproduction, the estrous cycle of the cow, proper A.I. techniques, cow management, breeding-program management and general trouble-shooting of complicated reproductive management. To facilitate and encourage learning is the program's main objective, thereby making each Select Sires employee a more valuable asset to the orga-

Figure 1. Factors That Influence Conception Rates



Management & Environment
96 percent

Cow Fertility
3 percent

Bull Fertility
1 percent

Source: "Proper Use of ERCR Can Improve Conception Rates and Farm Profitability," by Dr. Kent Weigel.

SUPERIOR SETTLERS	Milk	Rel.	Type	Rel.
•INTEGRITY*TV 7H04213	+1,053	99% M	+2.02	99% M
•ROAD MARK*TV 7H04364	+433	99% M	+1.72	98% M
•RUBYTOM*TV 7H04525	+1,840	99% M	+7.76	99% M
DURHAM*CV 7H05157	+495	98%	+2.93	96%
•MAXIMILIAN*TV 7H05217	+603	89%	+1.17	80%
•MAGNUM*CV 7H05300	+1,653	96%	+0.94	90%
MARSHALL*TV 7H05375	+2,109	87%	+2.58	83%
•CURTIS*CV 7H05408	+1,259	90% M	+0.63	84%
•SOVEREIGN-RED*TV 7H05412	+527	95%	+1.09	90% M
•BOONE*TV 7H05484	+1,428	90%	+1.06	87%
•SAUNDERS*TV 7H05682	+1,203	85%	+0.96	83%
•FORBIDDEN*TV 7H05687	+1,458	86%	+2.41	85%
•TALISMAN*TV 7H05724	+1,487	82%	+2.05	82%
•SUPREME*TV 7H05752 <i>New</i>	+1,936	83%	+1.13	81%
•LINK*TV 7H05760	+1,476	84%	+1.75	82%
•ADAM-RED*TV 7H05785	+614	91% M	+1.32	84% M
•GENT*TV 7H05788 <i>New</i>	+1,620	77%	+1.38	73%
•SAHARA*TV 7H05799 <i>New</i>	+1,220	77%	+1.55	74%
•HI METRO*CV 7H05841	+715	87% M	+2.95	83%
•MAGNA*TV 7H05851	+1,905	81%	+2.02	78%
•DILLON*TV 7H05891 <i>New</i>	+2,031	80%	+1.32	71%
•PATRON*TV 9H01729	+1,008	99% M	+1.05	99% M
•GAYLON*TV 9H01999	+1,150	95%	+0.54	86%
•COOPER*TV 9H02344	+1,041	87%	+1.51	83%
•SHAWNEE*CV 9H02393	+1,009	85%	+1.32	85%
•CRACKER*TV 9H02394	+745	87%	+1.58	85%
•SPOCK*TV 9H02448 <i>New</i>	+480	86% M	+2.15	78%
•DAWSTON*TV 9H02458 <i>New</i>	+551	89%	+2.28	85%
•NIXON*TV 9H02462 <i>New</i>	+1,607	83%	+1.51	78%
•BENEDICT*TV 9H02608	+1,019	88%	+1.05	79%
•PITINO 7JE342	+79	99% M	+1.2	98% M
DECLO 7JE386	+1,395	95%	+1.4	92%
•PARADE 7JE472	+772	88%	+2.6	80%
•FREDRICO 7JE474	+1,179	81% M	+1.4	68%

♦Eligible for semen export to Canada. TMSUPERIOR SETTLER is a trademark of Select Sires Inc. 11-01 USDA PTAs Yield Reliability; M=IB/USA 11-01.

nization and to you, our customer.

Many professional Select Sires representatives also are skilled in the team-building process. Select Sires reproductive-solutions specialists would be honored to have the opportunity to increase the profitability of your dairy. Make our team part of your team. ♦