

## DATELINE : DAIRY



## Top-Quality Heifers

### Homegrown females are the answer for these Wisconsin dairy producers

All dairy producers rely on quality cows — and high milk yields — for a profitable bottom line. And growing a top-producing cow begins the day a heifer is born.

Thanks to innovative health and feeding programs, two family-owned Wisconsin dairy farms — the Bergmann brothers near Saint Croix Falls

and Udder Hills Dairy near Ellsworth — are consistently producing larger, better-milking heifers at an earlier age.

#### CALF MANAGEMENT

Careful calf management from day 1 sets heifers on the right track for top performance later in life at Justin and Will Bergmann's 100-cow dairy farm.

"We start right out making sure each calf gets 6 to 8 pints of colostrum in their first two feedings," says Will. "There is no substitute for adequate colostrum consumption. It's something you can't go back and fix later."

Justin says they've developed an intensive feeding program for the first 2 weeks of the calf's life. "The concentration of the milk replacer is gradually stepped up and we're very careful to mix it thoroughly and measure the amount we feed," he says.

Protecting the calf's intestinal tract early in life translates into better gains and more milk production when the heifer enters the herd.

#### FAST FACTS

- **Calves can become infected with coccidiosis within hours of birth through fecal material**
- **During the weaning process, calves can become stressed from commingling, ration changes and new environments**
- **Bovatec® can now be fed in combination with Aureomycin® for improved performance and disease control**
- **Faster gains and better heifer health mean less culling**



Justin and Will Bergmann:

'We want to see the bottom of the pail between feedings.'

"Feeding a pelleted anticoccidial such as Bovatec® (lasalocid) protects the calf from bloody diarrhea and intestinal damage associated with a coccidiosis outbreak," says Dr. Lance Fox, a technical service veterinarian for Alpharma Inc. who works closely with coccidiosis in dairy herds.

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**'When calves develop respiratory symptoms caused by weaning or weather conditions, the addition of Aureomycin to the feeding program is simple and cost effective'**

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When the Bergmans add starter feed to the calf hutch, they're careful to keep the feed fresh. "It would be easier to dump in enough starter for the entire day or even 2 days, but we want to see the bottom of the pail between feedings," explains Justin. "It helps the calves consume more feed."

The availability of fresh water at all times is also a critical factor in promoting starter intake.

#### MANAGING COCCIDIOSIS

Utilizing the calf-hutch system reduces the levels of coccidial oocysts and opportunity for coccidiosis outbreaks. Even so, calves can become infected with coccidiosis within hours of birth through fecal material. A single animal can shed more than 15 million oocysts for each oocyst ingested, creating a vicious infectious cycle caused by *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii*, two species of a microscopic parasite.

Once the calves reach 7 weeks of age, they're weaned and moved into group pens. "Because the calves are accustomed to receiving starter pellets in their hutches, the shift to grain plus pellets is much easier and doesn't set them back," notes Justin. "We don't have to teach them how to eat."

During the weaning process, calves can become stressed from commingling, ration changes and new environments, among other things. The Bergmanns continue feeding Bovatec during this critical period. Bovatec has been shown to be highly palatable — an important consideration when animals are stressed. It also improves weight gain and feed efficiency.



Fox notes that now that Bovatec and Aureomycin® (chlortetracycline) can be fed in the same ration, it's easier than ever for producers to treat bovine respiratory disease (BRD). Early diagnosis and treatment help reduce losses from BRD, which studies have shown costs cattle producers, on a national basis, up to \$1 billion annually.

“When calves develop respiratory symptoms caused by weaning or weather conditions, the addition of Aureomycin to the feeding program is simple and cost effective,” Fox says.

#### GROWING THE HEIFER

Most dairy experts recommend that a dairy heifer gain no more than 2.2 pounds per day to prevent the heifer from depositing excess body fat that can cause reduced milk production later in life. Experts also recommend that dairy heifers calve no later than 24 months of age.

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**‘We’re calving at 23 to 24 months and our production records show 3,000 pounds more milk per cow since we started this program 4 years ago’**

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In an effort to improve heifer quality, John Hinrichs of Udder Hills Dairy, along with son Kyler, decided to move from a custom grow-out program to producing their replacement heifers in their own 200-cow dairy system.



John Hinrichs (left) with youngest son Shayne and herdsman Mark Girdeen: 'Our calves are 20 to 40 pounds heavier at birth.'

“We had the feed and we wanted to improve the quality of heifers for breeding,” says Hinrichs. “Today, our calves are 20 to 40 pounds heavier at birth and our milk production is up as well.”

#### BUILDING IMMUNITY TO COCCIDIOSIS

In its ongoing efforts to improve heifer gain and maturity, Udder Hills Dairy includes Bovatec in its rations until breeding. It can be fed to calves as early as the milk replacer and on through maturity to safeguard against coccidiosis.



The unique combination of disease prevention plus improved growth and maturity rates can help dairy producers get replacement heifers bred and milking more cost effectively.

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**‘With more top quality animals available, we’re able to sell some as replacement heifers to other dairymen and improve our bottom line’**

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Udder Hills Dairy is breeding for 21-month calving based on the heifer's size and development rather than her age. “We do push our heifers on growth, but along the way, we've also discovered that they really thrive if they're able to develop on grass for a short time,” points out Hinrichs.

The Bergmanns rely on a customized feeding program for their developing heifers as well. The resulting heifers show more consistent growth and improved size. “We’re calving at 23 to 24 months and our production records show 3,000 pounds more milk per cow since we started this program 4 years ago,” reports Justin.

Faster gains and better heifer health mean less culling for both farms. “With more top quality animals available, we’re able to sell some as replacement heifers to other dairymen and improve our bottom line,” says Hinrichs. “That’s a win-win situation.”

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For more information about the new Aureomycin-Bovatec combination, producers should contact their feed supplier or AlphaPharma representative, or go to [www.AlphaPharmaCattle.com](http://www.AlphaPharmaCattle.com).

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