The 2015 Western Dairy Management Conference (WDMC) convened in Reno, Nevada from March 3 – 5. Quality information was shared on a variety of topics including nutrition, reproduction, transition management and genomics.

Reproduction

Dr. Julio Giordano, Cornell University, discussed the use and economics of Automated Activity Monitoring (AAM). He showed a difference in heat detection rate (HDR) and ovulation, questioning if all cows that do not show heat are actually anovular. The data presented that 2/3 of cows were detected in heat by AAM and ovulated, while the remaining 1/3 cows were not. Of that 1/3 that were not detected in heat, three different scenarios were present: A) did not show heat, but were ovulating (11%); B) detected in heat but were not ovulating (3%); C) were not in heat and were not ovulating (19 %). The true percentage of anovular cows was 22% in comparison to the 33% originally thought. He concluded that the AAM system could replace conventional heat detection on farms with low pregnancy rates (PR). Whereas on farms with middle to highly efficient PR, the cost of RMS is still well justified.

Dr. Ricardo Chebel of the University of Florida presented information regarding overcrowding in the Jersey breed. In contrast to previous research from University of Wisconsin on the Holstein breed, Chebel concluded that Jerseys are more resistant to overcrowding. He presented β-hydroxybutyrate (BHBA) values along with other metabolites that showed no difference across group density levels.

Dr. Paul Fricke of the University of Wisconsin presented the differences in accuracy and precision of pregnancy associated glycoproteins (PAGs) between tests of the blood and milk in his talk entitled, “Milk vs. Blood – Which is Best for PAG Pregnancy Prediction?”. Dr. Fricke concluded that he has more confidence in the blood test.

Dr. Kent Weigel, University of Wisconsin, noted that the majority of the semen in the AI marketplace comes from young genomic sires and showed data indicating there may be issues of lower reliability with these bulls versus proven sires. To offset the impact of the lower reliability of the young sires, Dr. Weigel recommended using a variety of bulls rather than focusing too heavily on any individual. He concluded that when herds develop standard procedures for their genetic management of replacement animals, “including genomic testing, culling, breeding, mating and related decisions”, they will see the greatest return on their investment in the technology.

Nutrition

The following presentations merit reading in full, please find them linked: A) Dr. William Weiss, Ohio State University, “Variation in Nutrient Composition of Ingredients and TMR and Does it Matter to a
Dr. Michael Ballou of Texas Tech University, discussed calf nutrition in relation to disease. His research focused on different levels of calf nutrition and the use of probiotics, prebiotics and protein from hyper-immunized egg or plasma. He showed that cutting corners resulting in poor nutrition at the pre-weaning stage is associated with increased risk of enteric diseases and pneumonia.

The agenda was well designed appropriately addressed all relevant areas of the dairy operation. Strategies and techniques were presented that will no doubt bring industry to the next level. For full length proceedings of this year’s conference and information from previous years, please visit the following site: http://www.wdmc.org/proceed.htm