

FEATURED

# Efficiency: Getting More From Cows You Have

Philip Gruber, Staff Writer Feb 23, 2018 Updated Feb 23, 2018 (0)



f t e p b

In one example, Galligan found that adding 0.2 pounds of milk per cow in a 100-cow herd would equal the production from a new cow.

“That screams to me, ‘make milk, make milk,’ ” he said.

As cows eat more, the feed travels through them faster and fewer nutrients get absorbed.

Even then, Galligan’s model suggests the higher intake levels provide a return.

Joe Bender, a Penn Vet staff veterinarian, has seen this concept work in real life.

He worked with a family that was making money milking cows and had the chance to buy a nearby property.

“Is there anything more tempting than buying the neighbor’s farm?” Bender said.

The farm’s financial advisers said the purchase wasn’t a good idea, but the family bought the farm anyway.

The business was soon bleeding money.

The family got back into the black by adding 10 cows and making some adjustments to boost milk production.

Obviously, this was not an ideal situation, but “they were smart enough to say right at the very beginning, ‘Hey, we bought this farm. Now we have a problem right away,’ ” Bender said. “Not go three or four years not being able to pay your bills and then asking for help. Then it’s too late.”

Farmers can also maximize per-cow milk production by getting cows bred back expeditiously.

That’s because a cow produces the most milk early in the lactation and because her second lactation is generally more productive than her first.

Shortening the open period spreads the farm’s costs across more pounds of milk, Galligan said.

Farmers can also find efficiencies through culling.

Letting a cow linger in the herd till she breaks down isn’t smart if there’s a better heifer coming up behind her.

The efficiency gains are important enough that some large farmers are even starting to use computer models to make culling decisions, Galligan said.

The heifer herd needs to have the right number of animals to replace the cows exiting the milking herd, and the age at first calving can dramatically affect how many heifers are needed.

In a 100-cow herd with a 33 percent annual culling rate, a farmer would need to raise 61 heifers that have their first calving at 22 months.

If the age at first calving falls back to 26 months, 72 heifers would be needed.

“You have to feed a lot more heifer feed for 72 animals than 61, right? And the revenue of the milk is staying the same,” Galligan said.

Milk price and yield are by far the largest drivers of cow value.

Farmers mostly have to live with the price they get, but they have more control over how much milk they make and whether they earn component bonuses.

“If you’re not going after that top tier, you’re not going to move that annual profit much,” Galligan said.

“If you’re going after what I call small potatoes, OK, you’re treading water.”

f t e p b

Tags: Economics Commerce Zootechnics Industry Cow Finance Milk Heifer David Galligan Agriculture Herd Farmer Newsletter



**Philip Gruber**

Phil Gruber is a staff writer at *Lancaster Farming*. He can be reached at (717) 721-4427 or pgruber.eph@lnpnews.com. Follow him @PhilLancFarming on Twitter.

t e

f t e



## Latest Print Edition



Stay up-to-date on the latest in crop research, market reports, business trends, scientific innovation and more.

## Poll

Will the agriculture economy grow regardless of missteps by the government?

February 24, 2018

## Most Popular

### Articles

- [Pennsylvania Hemp Farmers Seek to Grow Up to 1,000 Acres in 2018](#)
- [The General of Berks County](#)
- [Family Finds Higher Purpose in Farming](#)
- [Farmers Need Plan for Employee Compensation](#)
- [Humor Makes NFL Dairyman a Champion](#)
- [Dairy Co-ops Ponder Supply & Demand Quandaries](#)
- [Pig Barn Permit Appealed to Pennsylvania Supreme Court](#)
- [New Spokesperson Crowned for New York State Dairy Industry](#)
- [Hydroponics Dilute Organic Brand, Leaders Say](#)
- [Vet School Loan Forgiveness Available](#)



## Quick Markets

CROPS	LIVESTOCK	DAIRY	ENERGY	METALS
Name	Contract	Last	Change	
Corn	ZCH18 (Mar '18)	369-6	+1-2	▲
Corn	ZCK18 (May '18)	378-6	+1-4	▲
Corn	ZCN18 (Jul '18)	386-4	+1-4	▲
Soybeans	ZSH18 (Mar '18)	1042-6	+8-4	▲
Soybeans	ZSK18 (May '18)	1054-6	+8-6	▲
Soybeans	ZSN18 (Jul '18)	1063-6	+8-4	▲
Wheat	ZWH18 (Mar '18)	465-0	+5-4	▲
Wheat	ZWK18 (May '18)	478-2	+5-4	▲
Wheat	ZWN18 (Jul '18)	492-4	+5-0	▲
CME Cotton #2	KGK18 (May '18)	0.8215s	+0.0081	▲
CME Cotton #2	KGN18 (Jul '18)	0.8275s	+0.0068	▲
CME Cotton #2	KGV18 (Oct '18)	0.7828s	+0.0024	▲
Rough Rice	ZRH18 (Mar '18)	11.945	+0.055	▲
Rough Rice	ZRK18 (May '18)	12.155	+0.060	▲
Rough Rice	ZRN18 (Jul '18)	12.360	+0.045	▲