
Organizing advice for dairy herds breeders: Example of a Milk Recording Organisation in the west of France

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BCEL Ouest is a milk recording organization run by farmers for farmers. BCEL Ouest directs its action and innovates to support dairy farmers to develop their performance and competitiveness as part of their operating strategy.

Our approach is to help farmers to express the genetic potential of their livestock. For this purpose, our advisors and consultants assist farmers in efficient herd management based on data and predictive indicators.

Keywords: advice organization in dairy herds, herd management.

BCEL Ouest is a milk recording organization that works with more than 6,000 dairy farms located in Brittany, in the west of France. The average farm in Brittany is on 85 hectares of crops and pastures, has a 63 dairy cows' herd that produces 8050 kg of milk per cow (2014).

We offer a wide range of services as: milk recording, herd management advice, agronomy advice, cattle housing design, trimming, testing of milking machine, etc.

The members of our non-profit organization represent 72% of the milk producers of our area for milk recording, and 65% for herd management advice.

The whole data collection organization relies on 300 operators totally dedicated to this activity. 6 data collecting protocols are offered. 85% of collections are realised by our operators and 15% by the breeders themselves. Since 5 years, the collection of data is realised during milking and totally digitalized through PDA. The traceability of collected samples is guarantee by the RFID technology. Information is immediately transferred to regional data bases. This data collection will be soon available on smart phones.

Since 2013 cattle disease data are also recorded by the operators at the end of milking. This allows us to establish a health data base.

Abstract

Introduction

The milk recording organization

The advisory approach

A network of 160 advisors

Over the years, the milk collection process allowed us to develop an activity of herd management advice. We have today a network of 160 advisors who propose their expertise to dairy farmers on our territory (divided into 8 areas). Most of our advisors have obtained a Master's degree, specializing in livestock production.

Each advisor works with 30 to 50 farms throughout the year. The advisor comes between 6 to 11 times per year in the farm, number based on the contract signed between BCEL Ouest and the dairy farmer. Each working session takes place during 3 hours. It usually occurs after a data collection sequence which provides the recent data on the dairy animal behavior and livestock performance.

As a result of his active listening from the dairy farmer at each meeting, and his knowledge of the herd and the area production conditions, the advisor establishes a diagnosis of main results and actions regarding the herd management. He gives breeders advices about:

- Herd performances analysis.
- Livestock feeding and forage production: ration proposal, monitoring the cost on food margin.
- Forage stocks management.
- Cattle disease prevention: reproduction, milk quality and udder health.
- Herd renewal and genetic selection: heifers breeding, mating choice.
- Forecasting of milk volumes to be delivered in the next year.

The advisor has a permanent access to the data of the livestock through a specific software at his disposal.

An annual technical report

Each year we establish a technical management annual report that allows an analysis of the strengths and issues for improvement in herd management. It is focused on different results such as milk quality, reproduction performances, levels of milk reference achievement and describes especially the feeding system.

This global diagnosis of dairy management helps us to plan for the future of the farm.

It is a common tool shared by the breeder and his advisor to identify the technical focus on improving, and to measure the financial impacts obtained.

The compilation of these data in the followed farms allows us to establish some technical and economic references adapted to different breeding systems. Thus, 15 different reference groups are identified according to the breed, the size, the feeding system of the herd, the yield per cow and the milking system.

A breeder extranet for perfect traceability

Breeders have a permanent access to their own dedicated extranet, where they can find all the information concerning the milk recording results of each cow and of the herd. They will also find all the technical reports about herd management and agronomy advices. Our aims trough this extranet are to make the data available as soon as possible, to guarantee the data's traceability and ensure the quality of our advisory approach.

Beyond the individual advisory approach, many farmers wish to share their experience in a collective process. We have 50 existing groups today, each one ruled by a specific advisor. They meet 4 times a year in the farms of the members; they choose the issues on which they wish to work, exchange experience and practices. Each session is an opportunity to highlight effective ways of innovation, to identify the successful practices of breeding and to compare regularly their technical and economic results.

50 Groups of farmers

Our approach within the company is to make this collective reflection enriching the process of the individual advice brought to them.

The collective support and sharing of experience are the keys to progress.

Our operators and advisors are daily present at the heart of dairy operations. Today, advice activity represents 45 000 professional meetings between our experts and dairy producers, and 25% of our business.

Conclusion

In addition to the milk recording activity, the advisory approach builds trust between BCEL Ouest and its 6 000 members and offers us the opportunity to develop solutions to help breeders to face the future.