

# Records — herd bulls leave few by Hoard's Dairyman staff

**H**OW can you manage a situation without the proper information? A checkbook can't be balanced without deposit and debit records. Tax forms cannot be completed without knowing income and expenses. Likewise, it's darn difficult to determine when cow No. 1403 should go dry or when she is due if you breed with a herd bull. The best information to manage your business is simply an esti-

mated guess. In the world of the IRS, that could land you in jail. In the dairy world, it will shrink your profit.

"Because records are not available when using bulls, fertility often is assessed by monitoring calving interval," says reproductive specialist Paul Fricke. "Unfortunately, if a fertility problem does occur, four to five months must elapse before the problem is reflected by a change in the calving in-

terval. Identification and correction of fertility problems in herds using natural service is delayed and always a problem," says the University of Wisconsin specialist.

"Expected calving dates can be calculated from A.I. breeding dates and used to optimize dry periods and manage transition cows," notes Fricke. "Oftentimes, expected calving dates of bull-bred cows are underestimated or overestimated by as many as two weeks, and this variation can have an impact on profitability.


"Insufficient dry periods do not allow time for adequate mammary cell regeneration and result in lowered milk production during the ensuing lactation," he says. "On the other hand, excessive dry periods are costly due to lost productive days in lactation.

"That's not all. Nutritional management of dry cows includes feeding a transition ration several weeks before calving. Economic losses accrue due to production losses and higher incidences of metabolic and physiologic disorders when transition diets are fed too early or too late with respect to calving," states Fricke.

## What about inbreeding?

"Anyone who milks cows for a living loses profit from inbred cows," says geneticist Bennet Cassell. "In fact, according to our research, there is a **\$24 loss in lifetime net income** for each 1 percent increase in inbreeding in Holsteins."

Without records and known parentage information, you can't change the detrimental impact of inbreeding. "We don't know much about inbreeding until the time a heifer freshens, but embryonic death, calf mortality, growth rates, and heifer fertility are almost certainly affected in undesirable ways," says the Virginia Tech specialist. "Once an inbred heifer freshens, she tends to have longer calving intervals, depressed production in each lactation, and fewer days of productive life."

To avoid inbreeding, you need to have sound records. That involves sires and dams. Without those records, economic losses cannot be avoided. "Avoiding inbreeding is the most crucial reason for commercial producers to keep sound pedigree information on their cows," concluded Cassell. 

## Gene Smith — a survivor

**T**HANKS to two sons and their friend, Gene Nelson lived to tell about his near fatal bout with a herd bull.

It all began as a routine day. The herd of 66 cows was turned out in the afternoon for daily exercise. At the same time, the 2-year-old herd bull went out, his mission — to breed any cows that were in heat, say Penn State Extension specialists in a report about the incident.

That's where the routine ended on that Tuesday, November 27, 2001, afternoon. Gene's sons, Ken and Reuben, and Reuben's friend, Josh Morrow, were feeding the cows. As they finished, Gene opened the door to let the cows back into the stall barn. All but three cows and the bull came back into the barn. Those four hung back. Gene went around the silo to chase the quartet into the barn with an ax handle serving as protection. The four came to the door with Gene right behind, but at the door, the bull nudged a cow aside and knocked Gene to the ground.

The bull pinned the 54-year-old former military man against the barn wall and began pounding him with his head. Gene, who was still carrying the axe handle at the time, tried to hit the bull, but it had no effect. He yelled for help, and the boys came running with forks and were able to get the bull to back

away. Ken, the oldest son who now has a family of his own, held the bull at bay with a four-tined pitchfork. He yelled for his dad to get up and out of harm's way. But Gene, badly battered, could not move and cried out for the boys to call 911. Younger son, Reuben, and his friend, Josh, sprinted to the house, one to call for help and the other for the rifle.

The 24-month-old bull, weighing 1,500 pounds, was shot six times in the head before he went down. Soon, Bloomfield Volunteer Fire Department Ambulance Service responded to the call from the Union City, Pa., dairy and slid Gene onto a backboard, then carried him to the ambulance. He was taken to Hamot Medical Center's Trauma Unit and admitted with multiple broken ribs, a punctured and collapsed lung, and a bruised heart. Doctors clearly said, "If the bull would have had time for a couple more blows, Gene would have died."

Smith was released from the hospital on Sunday, five days after the near-fatal accident. At the time of his release, he was taking pills for pain, pills to reduce swelling around his heart, and pills to keep other pills from giving him an ulcer. Gene was lucky; within six months of the incident, he made a full recovery. Gene's wife, Martha, and his sons, Ken and Reuben, are mighty glad.

