Livestock

Dairies move to Holstein feeding

By RHONDA MCCURRY

In western Kansas, dairies are becoming as prevalent as feedlots. With more than 122,000 cows in milk production each year, there is also a strong market for feeding Holstein calves.

Six months ago, Cattle Empire Feedyards opened its latest facility, Empire Calf Ranch, near Satanta. With space for 24,000 head of Holstein calves, Roy Brown, chief executive officer and president of Cattle Empire LLC, says the company’s purpose is to address packers’ concerns about the red-meat production each year, there is also a strong market for feeding Holstein calves.

By pushing his calves early on, Goering says they perform more like a British-origin beef animal, but are still 7% less efficient to feed than other breeds of cattle.

The entire Goering family pitches in together to manage the daily routine of bottle-feeding. Each morning before school the two Goering children help hand out 300 bottles from a trailer designed for feeding baby calves. As they drive by a call hatch, they give one bottle to each calf.

Goering stops feeding milk once calves are consuming 2 pounds of starter ration per day.

Goering says if Holsteins are truly “califed,” the breed can put on pounds and gain to a finished weight several months early.

The feeding business requires Holstein steers to gain quickly and grade well. Brown says Empire Calf Ranch has managed to shorten the time its calves are on feed by 30 days.

“One of reasons we developed Empire Calf Ranch is that we wanted to control nutrition from day one,” Brown says. “Currently we have a 530-day feeding period from day one to harvest. Eliminating 30 to 60 days of feeding time saves quite a bit of money.”

McCurry writes from Colwich.

Looking for new dairy partners

EMPIRE Calf Ranch and Cattle Empire LLC wants to partner with dairymen, a unique and new idea in the feeding industry. Because the ranch can feed up to 24,000 head of Holstein calves at a time, its president, Roy Brown, is looking to enhance the way it does business.

“We want dairymen to partner with us all the way to harvest,” Brown says. “We are primarily a custom yard, so we prefer to feed for people other than ourselves. The calf ranch is a way to bring new customers into the feedlot business.”

Brown says the company is founded on the idea of partnership, and wants dairies to share in the economies of scale Cattle Empire has developed.

“We’ve built our business by letting the ‘little guy’ participate and be an equal partner in feeding cattle,” he says. “Now we want to do the same thing in the dairy industry.”

Cattle Empire LLC also owns Empire Dairy Services, which offers electrical work, plumbing and refrigeration.

The company also manages a 6,000-cow dairy, in addition to its main three feed yards with a 175,000-head capacity — all within 20 miles of each other.

Key Points

- The growing dairy industry brings with it the challenge of calf feeding.
- Cattle Empire operates a large-volume feeding operation.
- The Goering family operates a smaller, family-oriented feeding operation.

FEEDING CALVES: At the Goering farm in south-central Kansas, feeding Holsteins is a family occupation. Bradley, shown here with daughter Cassidy, 8, also gets help from wife Sharon and son Garrett, 11.

Source and age-verifying each animal, they were shipped to a New Mexico calf ranch until they weighed 350 pounds. At this target weight, they were brought back to Cattle Empire to finish and be harvested. In December 2008, Empire Calf Ranch completed construction on a new facility in order to keep calves within a 15-mile radius, focus on nutrition and ultimately ensure a smooth transition to the feedyard.

Bradley and Sharon Goering of Hesston are also capitalizing on the demand for califed Holsteins, feeding more than 1,000 head each year. Their calves are pushed hard on a 22% protein starter feed that includes corn, distillers grain, soybean meal and supplements. At 250 pounds, the Goerings finish calves on a 14% protein diet including long-stem wheat straw.

“Some might say we push them too soon but we feed them to look more like typical beef cattle,” Bradley Goering says. “Calves that were fed this way last summer graded 77% choice.”

By pushing his calves early on, Goering says they perform more like a British-origin beef animal, but are still 7% less efficient to feed than other breeds of cattle.

The entire Goering family pitches in together to manage the daily routine of bottle-feeding. Each morning before school the two Goering children help hand out 300 bottles from a trailer designed for feeding baby calves. As they drive by a call hatch, they give one bottle to each calf.

Goering stops feeding milk once calves are consuming 2 pounds of starter ration per day.

Goering says if Holsteins are truly “califed,” the breed can put on pounds and gain to a finished weight several months early.

The feeding business requires Holstein steers to gain quickly and grade well. Brown says Empire Calf Ranch has managed to shorten the time its calves are on feed by 30 days.

“One of reasons we developed Empire Calf Ranch is that we wanted to control nutrition from day one,” Brown says. “Currently we have a 530-day feeding period from day one to harvest. Eliminating 30 to 60 days of feeding time saves quite a bit of money.”

McCurry writes from Colwich.

Swine Briefs

Piglet feed supplements support immune systems

According to studies by USDA Agricultural Research Service scientists, feeding dried distillers grains to piglets can give their immune systems an extra boost. For their research on piglets, the team divided weaning pigs into four groups and fed them either a standard control diet or diets supplemented with DDGs, soybean hulls or citrus pulp. After one week, the researchers observed an increase in cytokine expression in the pigs’ small intestine, which they linked to DDG consumption. Cytokines are chemical messengers that are essential for proper immune function.

Pork Checkoff teams up with military

The Defense Commissary Agency, which serves 276 military bases worldwide, has enlisted special pork promotions in 2009. By partnering with Johnsonville sausages, the Pork Checkoff worked with the agency to feature a full-page sausage ad and 50-cent coupon in a coupon magazine that is hand-delivered to each military family’s door. The campaign was so successful that the agency is already working with the Pork Checkoff on a “Meat Your Healthy Choices” promotion for the summer of 2009. In this meat managers’ contest, the commissary with the highest-percent increase in pork sales will win prizes.