

Topic of the Month

“Horny Beef”

As I was running down the road the other day, I passed a sign by a barn that made me do a double take. At first glance, I was certain the sign said “Caution: Horny Beef”. As that sank into my brain and my jaw dropped, I looked back and read, more carefully, a sign that said “Caution: Honey Bees”. In an instant, my mindset changed from avoiding the amorous advances of a lovestruck brood cow to locating a pond where I could hide from an angry swarm of bees.

Fortunately, I didn’t have to contend with either scenario, but I think the obvious question is why that story would appear in this newsletter. Here’s the answer: the dairy economy is on the forefront of many people’s thoughts, including mine, and I couldn’t help but draw a metaphor from my experience. We’ve been seeing and hearing the warning signs for a while about markets and pricing and co-ops. What do we do about it?

Our producer meeting will be held in February. Much like my anecdote, it may not provide lots of answers. But also like my anecdote, we hope that it will stress the importance of careful reading of the signs and of being prepared with a plan.

Along these lines, Dr. Tom Bass will discuss coping ideas for these hard times. Dr. Bill Croushore will discuss protocol development- automatic decision trees that are most likely to yield a positive outcome without spending money unnecessarily or getting in over your head. Finally, we hope to touch on when it’s time to call for backup. And we will definitely enjoy a good meal. We hope to see you there.

Commodity Futures

Prices

As of January 31, 2018

Corn	\$3.61/bu
Soybean Meal	\$337.80/ton
Milk	\$14.00/cwt
Beef (Live cattle)	\$123.85/cwt

Practice News & Upcoming Events

- White Oak Veterinary Clinic and Rob’s Rations will co-sponsor a Winter Producer Meeting on February 13 at the Berlin Fire Hall. Coffee and donuts begin at 10 and lunch will be provided. Topics will include protocol development for your farm and ideas for surviving low milk prices. Featured speakers are Dr. Bill Croushore, of WOVC, and Dr. Tom Bass of Renaissance Nutrition. RSVP by February 8 to Rob’s Rations or White Oak.
- SW Pennsylvania Regional Dairy Day will be held Thursday, March 1, at the Chestnut Ridge Conference Center in Blairsville. This year’s program is entitled *Cool, Comfortable Cows Handling Transitions Without a Hitch* and will feature Dr. Nigel Cook from the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Cook is an expert in transition cow management and this is arguably the most critical time in the life of a dairy cow. The event is free and includes lunch but you must register by February 22 by calling [1-877-345-0691](tel:1-877-345-0691) or visiting the PennState Extension website.

In The News

- A recent article in *Progressive Dairyman* discussed navigating the legal implications of direct milk supply contracts. While dairies continue to struggle with difficult decisions, some farms have begun to turn to private contracts to ensure their market and avoid pricing volatility. Admittedly, the idea may be more suited to larger farms, but not necessarily so. Regardless, there are many potential pitfalls in the contracts, and the advantage is usually not with the producer. Nevertheless, there is at least one law firm working to level the playing field and help supply contractors fix the shortcomings in the contracts, so that if this trend really catches hold in our industry, the contracts should be more equitable.