



## Health Recording to Benefit Dairy Producers

Routine disease recording is set to benefit individual producers and industry alike

After more than a year of preparation, the Canadian dairy cattle improvement industry partners have launched the Canadian National Health Project. This is the result of consultation between Canadian Dairy Network, Canadian Dairy Herd Improvement partners, breed associations, A.I. organizations and specific veterinary groups. Implementation of this program places Canada among the first countries worldwide to introduce a national system of collecting disease incidence data.

The project will focus on the recording of eight key diseases in dairy cattle. These include mastitis, lameness, cystic ovarian disease, displaced abomasums, ketosis, metritis, milk fever and retained placenta.

Using existing DHI recording programs, on test day, data will be collected from producers who, in conjunction with their veterinarians, will diagnose and record the incidence of the key diseases from birth to removal from the herd. Health management reports will be generated by DHI and this data will not only assist producers and their veterinarians in making better herd management decisions, but will also assist in assuring consumers that the dairy industry is proactive in the area of animal health. Michael Hall, a dairy producer and Chairman of the Canadian Dairy Network states, "Society is placing more emphasis on health, including wholesome food products from healthy cows. This cooperative industry project to develop a national dairy cattle health database is very timely."



In addition, the data collected will also enable the calculation of genetic evaluations which will allow dairy farmers to breed for increased disease resistance. Pierre Laliberté, Vice-President, Genetics for the Semex Alliance says, "In the last few years health and fertility traits have become more important to farmers in Canada and worldwide to increase the overall profitability of their operations. Thanks to the National Health Project, sires sampled in Canada will obtain a genetic evaluation for key health traits. To better answer our clients needs, Semex is looking forward to offering this information and help our clients to develop more profitable cows."

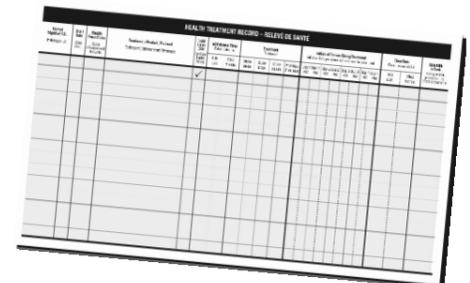
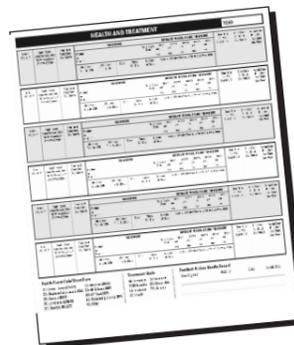
The primary funding for this project was provided by Holstein Canada in the amount of \$600,000, which was available through their allocation of the Agriculture and Agri-

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Food Canada "Sustaining the Genetic Quality of Ruminants Program". Keith Flaman, Secretary-Manager of Holstein Canada, states, "The Canadian dairy industry is stronger than ever because of the commitment of breeders to make improvement by participating in genetic programs." He sums up the necessity to participate with, "How we did things yesterday, will not get the job done for us tomorrow."

Identifying the incidence of these eight primary diseases will allow Canadian dairy producers to make better decisions to reduce production losses and treatment costs. In the longer term, Canadian producers will be in a desirable position to include health traits as part of their sire selection criteria. However, the key to the success of this initiative lies in the hands of dairy producers. Hall puts it this way, "At the end of the day, the best way for producers to receive valuable health management reports to help improve decisions, is if health data is recorded on a routine basis and provided to DHI staff on test day."

To find out more about health reports or how you can start recording health information talk to your DHI staff or any AI and breed association representative.



DHI tools such as Dairy Comp software, the Herd Event Log Book (left) and Calendar (above) make routine on farm health and animal treatment recording convenient.

### CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

## Producer cooperation – the next step

For several decades Canadian Dairy Farmers have been cooperating by collecting production and type data from their dairy herds to improve cow profitability and their competitiveness on the world genetics market. Years of type classification and milk recording along with careful selection of proven sires and diligent use of test sires has led our industry where it is today – one of the foremost in the world.

In the beginning, this data collection was very basic and provided only rudimentary information for the industry to work with. As our knowledge increased so did our data collection methods, giving us more complete and accurate data with which to breed a better dairy cow. None of this would have been possible without the high level of cooperation among Canadian dairy farmers who collect this data on a daily basis.

As dairy farmers, we are always striving to improve our businesses and with the introduction of the Canadian National Health Project we now have a new tool in our arsenal to do just that!

The project will focus on the recording of eight key diseases in dairy cattle. These include mastitis, lameness, cystic ovaries, displaced abomasums, ketosis, metritis, milk fever and retained placentas. Using existing DHI programs the data will be collected on test day from producers who, in conjunction with their vet, will diagnose and record the incidence of these key diseases throughout each animal's life. This industry-wide cooperative effort will benefit us at the farm level in three ways:

1) Health Management Reports will be generated by DHI that will include the individual herd information as well as benchmarks with similar herds across the country. This data will not only

assist producers and their vets in making better herd management decisions, but will also assist in assuring consumers that the Dairy Industry is proactive in the area of animal health.

2) The data collected will also enable the calculation of genetic evaluations which will allow dairy farmers to breed for increased disease resistance, which in turn will help breed a more profitable, trouble free cow.

3) Though more long-term, this data will enable researchers to more accurately study our national herd and reduce the data collection costs associated with research projects aimed at improving the dairy cow.

Now it's up to us – the producers – to collect this data on a routine basis and provide it to DHI staff on test day. For those of us using Dairy Comp software, this information transfer will take place automatically as long as all disease data is entered in the program. For farmers using the DHI Calendar or Log Book, the information can be recorded in the appropriate spot and DHI staff will enter it into their computer on test day.

The success of this health project is of equal importance as was the recording of milk weights and fat percentages decades ago. It is one of the keys to retaining our competitive edge.

This is the next step in the Canadian dairy industry!

*DHI Chairman, John Bongers, is a dairy producer from Elgin, Ontario.*