

Panel Discussion of Producers Sharing Their “Experiences in Relocating and Expanding Dairies”

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Successful relocation or expansion of a dairy farm is a challenging task and could be compared to mountain climbing where progress is sometimes measured in feet and attention to critical minute details is critical to the success of the project.

Planning an expansion involves many activities including site selection, business plan development, financial development, designing, specification development, legal organization, permitting, public relations, bid assimilation, contractor selection, construction management, feed procurement, animal selection, hiring employees, training employees, protocol development, and information management. All of these items must be addressed, but what are the key factors to be considered?

Once the dairy is built, the real challenges begin. Now the challenge is to provide for cow and worker comfort while operating an efficient dairy. Managing the flow of cows, people, equipment, manure, feed, production information and financial resources becomes the challenge of the day. How do successful managers switch from the construction phase to the management of the dairy? What items are important to consider and how does a manager prioritize management time and effort?

Labor, labor management, task assignment, and the flow of information from various parts of the dairy are among the daily challenges for dairy managers. How do you attract employees and then how do you develop a group of employees into an efficient team for your dairy? What skills or qualities do employees need to be successful in your operation? Establishment of the labor force is a critical factor in any dairy operation.

Dairy expansion has many potential pitfalls. Sometimes what appear to be small mistakes at the time can snowball into major challenges later. Often these mistakes are not recognized until later in the process. At this point it is often difficult to correct the mistake and it may create a bottleneck in the dairy operation. How have successful dairy expansions avoided mistakes and how have they overcome the challenges associated with design flaws and other decisions which created major threats to the success of the operation.

Cow comfort is a major concern in the design process. Investments in facilities will only be rewarded if the facility provides for the improved comfort of the animal. Today there are many choices available in the selection of facilities. Facilities not only impact cow comfort, but they also play an important role in labor efficiency and the handling cows,

feed and manure. What criteria should be used in facility selection and design? How do construction cost choices impact the long term success of the dairy? What are the critical items that must be included?

Everyone generally has a few things that they might do different if given the chance to rewind history. If given the chance, what items would you change on your dairy? Those that have expanded dairies generally have similar experiences. Panel members will be given the chance to reflect on what they might change if given the opportunity.

A panel of dairy producers which have all experienced the challenges of expanding and relocating dairies will share their experiences and offer insight into what they believe are the most important factors in the success of their expansion projects. These producers are from different background and had different goals in their dairy expansion. This panel of three producers will share their experience in expanding their dairy operations.

Panel members will address the questions mentioned above as well as how they have dealt with cost overruns, capital management, labor, biosecurity, culling, public relations, and the day-to-day management challenges of a large dairy. Conference participants will also have the opportunity to ask panel members questions.