

Dairy Cattle Reproduction Reality Check # 1: We Have Tried to Fool Mother Nature

by George Heersche, Jr.

Mother Nature designed cows to get pregnant, give birth to a live calf, produce enough milk to nourish that calf and then get pregnant again. Mother Nature's nutritional priorities are: 1) growth and maintenance of the heifer/cow, 2) growth and maintenance of the fetus, 3) milk for the calf, and then 4) nutrients to reproduce again. We are wise to remember that we are asking the modern high producing cow to be a super female. We ask her to produce a large volume of nutritious milk, reproduce regularly, be trouble free and be happy about it. This was not in Mother Nature's original plan.

In addition, Mother Nature did not equip humans particularly well to manage a cattle artificial insemination program. For example, we are "heat detection challenged." Good dairy herd reproductive performance is not magic. It requires constant attention and management. It is a hassle and requires more diligence than some of us have to offer at times, but if we are not willing to put in the extra effort we cannot expect good performance.

It is wise to remember that we are trying to accomplish something that was not in Mother Nature's original design for the cow or us. Therefore, we need to strive to do the best we can, but not be too hard on ourselves when things are not perfect.