



IMPACT STATEMENT

Dairy Discussion Groups: *Plain and Fancy*

The Need

The small discussion group model has been demonstrated to be an effective forum for peer support and the exchange of ideas. Emphasizing a targeted membership in these groups helps ensure participant comfort levels, promotes free exchange of ideas and encourages a democratic topic selection and general group direction. The New York Farm Viability Institute through its “barriers in dairy” survey recognized the desire for such groups from dairy producers.

Facilitators of discussion groups are essential in providing the appropriate educational resources, as well as coordinating the scheduling and communications for the group. Extension personnel have aptly filled

this roll over the years.

Extension’s Response

Members of the NWNY Team were instrumental in the formation of two discussion groups within the nine county region. Days and times were suited to the groups. NYFVI funds provided funds for refreshments and/or lunches. In Yates County, a group of six Mennonite dairy producers gathered monthly from November 2008 to April 2009. The membership chose to discuss topics specifically pertaining to herd health and management, covering issues including milk quality, calf care, vaccinations, and reproduction. Similarly, a group of larger freestall operators assembled in Genesee County each month to discuss a slightly broader range of topics, including nutrient management, facility design considerations and managing Hispanic labor forces.

The Results

Members of the Yates County group reported many changes in their management practices, ranging from modifying a vaccination program to starting a pre- and post-dipping protocol at milking. One case of particular interest involved a group member struggling with fresh cow disorders. With input from the team, the herd veterinarian and a campus specialist, the producer was able to make some effective and drastic changes confidently and quickly.

Interestingly, the Genesee County group was comprised primarily of producers who traditionally had been absent from extension programs. Subsequent to the discussions there was an increase in our dialogue with these producers and their participation in extension events, such as Winter Dairy Management. This group has expressed an interest in resuming meetings in the fall, as well as touring manure handling facilities this summer. Curt Gooch, a campus-based engineer, has been asked to be involved in two manure storage projects by members following his appearance before the group.

