

Greetings,

Harvest is wrapping up, and this is the time for many meetings in the agriculture community. Ag Health Labs has been able to be present at 3 meetings including the **Pacific Northwest Animal Nutrition Conference (PNWANC)**, **Washington State Dairy Federation Meetings**, and **Washington Cattlemen's Meeting**. It is always good to attend these events to hear about current events, issues, and accomplishments over the past year. Social media was a common topic this year. Below are highlight's from the WSDF.



**Social Media:** Do you **Facebook?** **Twitter?** **LinkedIn?** Or **Flicker?** Washington Dairy Federation spent a lot of time and effort to educate meeting attendees about current trends in social media. There was an area (The Udder Café) designated specifically to signing up and training meeting attendees on how to use Facebook and Twitter. The emphasis behind this training was to encourage the dairy industry to use social media to communicate with others, as well as, to **“Tell Your Story”**. Don Schindler (Digital Initiatives, Dairy Management Inc) spoke about how society has changed and is continuing to change in regards to how they receive information. The media used to put a lot of effort into reporting accurate news stories. They double checked many sources to confirm accuracy. In today’s fast paced world where iphones, Androids and web based media is commonplace, news reporting has changed. It is more important to sensationalize the news, be the first to report on an issue, and report errors later. Accuracy and integrity of news is not as important.

Consumers have also shifted towards going to the internet to get information. We laugh at the phrase, “It must be accurate because I got it off the internet” because we know that everything on the internet is not fact based. However, as a society, we do go to the internet to get information. When we use the internet to gather information, many times, we are not checking to see if it is accurate. We just want a quick answer to a question and take it at face value.

That is why it is becoming increasingly important for all of us in agriculture to become more familiar with social media, and to start using it to portray a positive image of agriculture. The reason being, that the part of society that is anti-agriculture is using social media as a very effective tool to get their message across. This was very evident when Mr. Schindler started typing a question into the Google search browser. He started typing a phrase similar to ‘Is milk’. Google automatically brings up a list of suggested words to finish the questions. This list is generated based on the most frequently typed questions related to the topic. The first phrase in the list to complete ‘Is milk’ was ‘bad for you’. This means that the most typed sentence in the Google search was ‘Is milk bad for you?’.

## Happy Holidays

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**Mr. Schindler and others during the meeting suggested that more of us in the dairy industry must be actively using social media to ‘portray a positive image of dairy products and dairy farming’.** The Washington Dairy Federation and Washington State Dairy Products Commission are putting a lot of effort towards effectively influencing social media. However, they can’t do it all. They need producers and industry actively influencing social media. For more information on how to use social media as a positive influence contact the Washington State Dairy Federation at 360-482-3485 or [www.wadairyfederation.com](http://www.wadairyfederation.com).



### ***The Value of Pregnancy Diagnosis***

I’ve always been a little surprised at the number of beef cattle roaming Washington State and how infrequently I get asked as a veterinarian to pregnancy check beef cows. At some point in the past I assume veterinarians and agriculture economists endorsed the fact that feeding cows in the winter was expensive and it paid to find the open cows so they could be sold rather than fed through the winter. Or perhaps I heard more about the value of pregnancy checking while in class many years ago than ranchers heard in the field. Either way, the facts about feeding open cows still remain and in most cases the costs have become even more extreme as feed costs have risen.

Dr. Mark Hilton recently presented at the Washington State Vet Medical Association meeting and shared many great ideas on what contributes to the profitability of commercial cow-calf herds. He shared data from Mid-West Standard Performance Analyses where they found 57% of the variation in herd profit was due to one single factor; Feed Costs. And the majority of the feed cost incurred was for winter feed. One can make adjustments to feed type such as grazing crop residue to reduce feed costs, but even on the cheapest residues such as corn stalks it still costs \$20-30/cow/month. After about 2 months post harvest the value of corn stalks begins to decline and additional feedstuffs need to be provided to meet the nutritional needs of the late pregnant cow. For most producers this equates to supplemental hay. With current hay prices above \$180 per ton, feed costs rise dramatically. If you must feed hay throughout the winter it will result in costs of \$300-400 per cow.

So why feed an open cow through the winter only to sell her as a cull cow in the spring? Is it too expensive to have a veterinarian pregnancy test your cows? Utilizing a spreadsheet for calculating costs of pregnancy diagnosis and feed we can easily evaluate the economic value of pregnancy diagnosis. We also include variables in the calculations such as percent of herd pregnant (and open), feed intake, feeding

period, and testing costs. In most feeding systems we expect feed per cow to run between \$280-\$450 over a 4-6 month feeding period and most pregnancy tests to cost around \$4.00 including farm labor. On the low end, with low feed costs and 95% pregnancy rate, the advantage to preg check results in \$1025 per 100 cows and a 3:1 return on investment. On the high end of feed costs, with 90% pregnant rate, preg checking can result in \$2650 per 100 cows and a 7:1 return on investment.

Additionally, for my clients who want to be profitable, we have goals in reproductive efficiency which correlate with profitability. Targets like 90-95% pregnant in 65 day breeding season, less than a 2% abortion rate, and 65, 88, and 100% of calves born by days 21, 42, and 65 of the calving season respectively. While we could measure the calves born by cycle in the spring, we need pregnancy checks to evaluate percent pregnant and subsequent abortion rate. If we wait until spring and find a large percentage of cows open we don't know if they never were pregnant or if they had abortions. And we've lost virtually all ability to evaluate those cows and their environment to determine if they were dealing with nutritional issues, infections such as vibrio or trich, or a bull problem. It's all an unknown when you ask for help 6-8 months after the problem occurred. In order to help cattlemen measure and critique performance we must have current and accurate data to base our conclusions on. Without it we are making guesses and improvement comes slow or not at all.

Does that mean I want to pregnancy check every cow in Eastern Washington? NO. But between myself, my associate, and future team members we can certainly do more. So can other veterinarians. Some of you have learned to pregnancy test yourselves or have an employee trained in pregnancy diagnosis. However, I would caution you against paying a neighbor or friend to preg check your cows because a major factor in palpator accuracy is repetition and if they don't do enough numbers, you may not be satisfied with the results. Oh yeah, and did I mention they were your friend or neighbor?

So what other options are there? And what if you don't have a vet available within a 2 hour drive? One of the best options is a blood pregnancy test called BioPRYN. When BioPRYN first became commercially available we assumed it wouldn't apply to beef cattle operations because "you want to sort off open cows immediately". We didn't bother to look at the demographics of our Northwest ranches which currently sport an average herd size in the 20s. It has become apparent that BioPRYN has a major convenience factor for small producers who can test when they want (no scheduling a vet or paying a long distance stop charge), ship the samples to Ag Health Labs or another affiliate lab, and catch the open cows after they get the results in 2 days. Actually larger herds with over 300 head have successfully used BioPRYN where they don't find it difficult to catch open cows at a later date or where good vet support is not available. We have also had producers test heifers or AI cows early to either cull early when value is high, or to identify which are pregnant to AI breedings. Occasionally, in other situations, such as, an injured bull we have tested cows mid-breeding season to regroup all remaining open cows with a sound bull.

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BioPRYN has been used at Ag Health Labs since 2002, and we have run over 150,000 samples to date so it's use has been well tested. Biotracking, the manufacturer, has run over a million samples from around the country, as well as internationally. No test is perfect, including BioPRYN or Vets. BioPRYN can be run on cows bred 28 days or more and will call 99% of pregnant cows pregnant, and 95% of open cows open, so occasionally it will call an open cow pregnant. This most commonly occurs in early pregnancies such as dairy cows tested at 28-35 days bred when early embryonic loss is highest. The error rate on mid to late pregnant beef cows is much rarer and primarily occurs when a cow has recently aborted.

What other negative is there to using BioPRYN? Well facilities are one. But at least you don't have to pay a vet to wait for you to catch a cow. Facilities pay and having a vet stand around certainly doesn't. Learning to collect a blood sample is another hurdle, but if Charlie Card can do it, so can you! Blood is usually collected from the tail vein, but other sites work. We have a video on tail bleeding available on our website ([www.aghealthlabs.com](http://www.aghealthlabs.com)).

What are the other benefits of BioPRYN? Aside from you saving money on feed, the biggest benefit I see is the knowledge you can gain. If a problem shows up we can assist in trouble shooting why it has occurred or what to do to prevent it in the future. A veterinarian can always assist with evaluating pregnancy test results as long as we have data to evaluate.

Fred J. Muller, DVM