

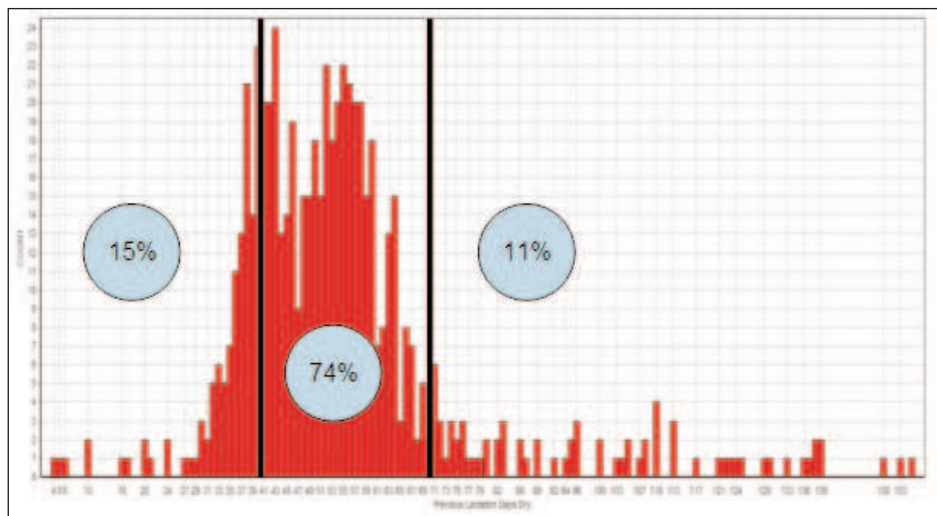
Dry Cow, Are We Asking The Right Questions? by George Cudoc

Many of the questions about dry cows seem to focus on the number of days they should stand dry, and if it is more profitable to decrease dry periods from the traditional 60 days to 45 days dry. Cows seem to be harder than ever to dry off due largely to the fact that Holstein cows have increased production per lactation an average of 8,000 lbs. in the last 15 years. Higher production over 305 day lactation also means higher production at the end of lactation when we are planning to dry cows off.

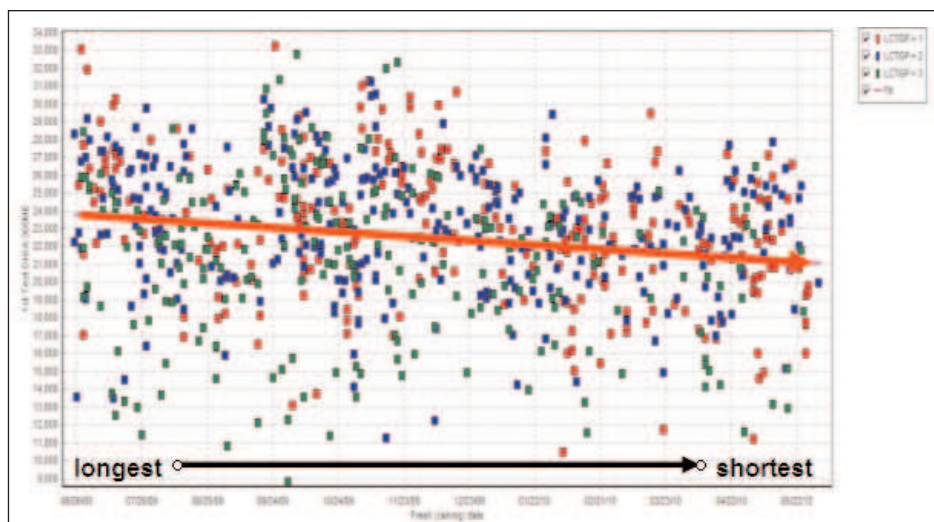
Recently published research has shown that yields on adjacent lactations for 1st and 2nd lactation cows were maximized when cows were dry 40-45 days. Older cows appear to maximize their production with at least 55 days dry which is very similar to the traditional 60 days. The least impact of shortening the dry period was on 1st lactation cows. After completed research was summarized it became obvious that good managers can change dry days successfully and the current recommendation is that dry periods be targeted at 40-70 days. When cows stand dry longer than 70 days we begin to see lower milk yield in adjacent lactations as well as lifetime production. Production losses increase the further cows go past 70 days dry. It is estimated that 11% of all Holstein cows experience dry periods longer than 70 days. Dry periods less than 30 and more than 90 days should be avoided, and shorter dry periods are better tolerated between 1st and 2nd lactation.

What questions should we ask before we consider doing something different with our dry cow management program? Start with questions about the implementation of the current program. Are we actually drying cows off near the intended time? What percent are on target for 40-70 days dry?

We can use software tools like DC305 to look at the answers. The herd graph in this example shows that while we are in the target range 74% of the time, the range is quite wide at 4 to 55 days dry. How do those 15% with short dry periods, and the 11% with longer than 70 days dry do, compared with those in the target range?



Other questions come to mind before we start to change our current dry cow program. For example, what do the lactation starts look like in the past year? To do this we can compare the 305ME first test day projection for each cow that has calved in the last 365 days and look at it graphically.



The numbers are not important, however the trend is toward lower starting production measured by the decreased 1st test day 305ME on the most recently fresh cows for the past year. This trend might influence any change in dry cow management to the extent that a fair comparison could not be made.

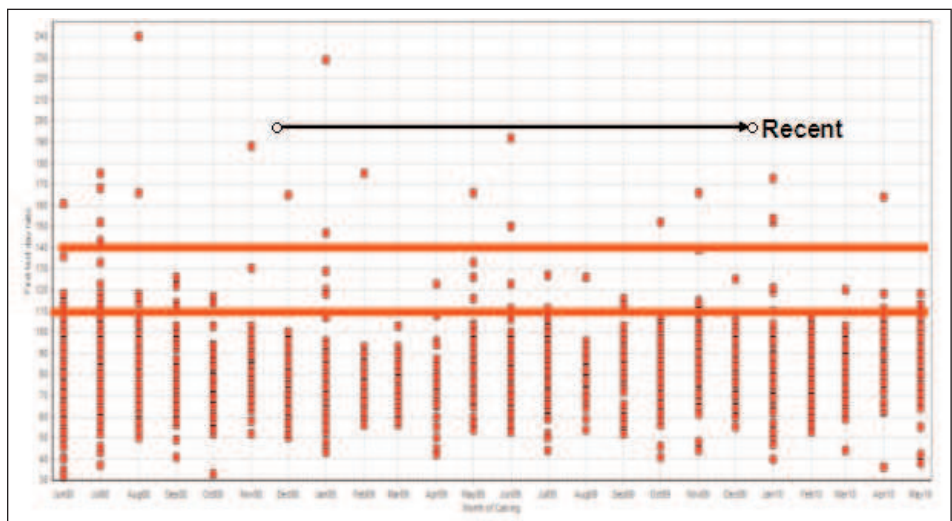
Are there other measures we can use to determine if our current dry cow program is successful? One goal of any dry program is to improve the chances of cows coming into the milking herd the next lactation free from udder infection. We can look at this by comparing the somatic cell linear score at the time we dried the cow off to the first test day linear score. We can then evaluate our ability to cure infected cows and maintain the clean status of those not infected.

	DRYLS	DRYLS	
	<4.0	>=4.0	
LOG1	New 119	Chronic 140	259
>=4.0	13%	16%	29%
-----+			
LOG1	Clean 417	Cured 206	623
<4.0	47%	23%	70%
=====			
	536	346	882
	60%	39%	100%

One last check we can make in evaluating our dry cow program is to look at the number of cases of metabolic diseases we are dealing with. These can include milk fever and ketosis but will be a challenge since there is often significant variability in diagnosing and recording these diseases at the farm. One way around this issue is to look at some routine measure that can be an indicator of such diseases. We can produce a graph that looks at the first test day fat to protein ratio for cows that have freshened over the past couple of years.

Again, not the numbers but the trend of having the majority of this herd below a 1:1 ratio and few cows between 1:1 and 1:4 ratios as a target may be signaling problems.

In summary, there are more important questions to be asked about our dry cow programs than whether we should target less days dry for our herd. If the answers are the right ones then research does prove some advantages in shortening dry periods. If the answers are wrong or not even asked then a change could be disastrous.



If you would like more information about herd records services, contact the Dairy One main office in Ithaca, New York at 1.800.496.3344 or e-mail: dmr@dairyone.com.

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