

NewsWatch

# UW receives grant to solve dairy puzzle

IT'S a dilemma for dairy farmers. While dairy cattle's capacity to produce milk continues to increase, their ability to reproduce is on the decline. A cow that can't make calves can't make milk, so profits slip away, no matter what her genetic potential.

Unraveling this reproduction puzzle is the focus of a new research program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Dairy Science. A team of researchers there has landed a \$1 million grant from USDA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative to sort through all of the factors that influence reproduction, such as nutrition, genetics, health, housing and management. The team will employ new statistical processes and computing power to tie together these factors, says dairy management specialist Victor Cabrera, the team leader.

"We're going to collaborate with dairy producers to gather data from all parts of the operation, then use statis-

### Key Points

- UW gets \$1 million USDA grant to study cow reproduction.
- Two hundred dairies will participate in the research.
- UW proposal was selected from 22 grant proposals.



**CABRERA**

tical modeling to draw inferences about the factors involved," he explains.

The goal is to give dairy producers the knowledge to adjust management of all the appropriate areas to increase reproductive performance, rather than fixating on a single factor as is often done now, Cabrera notes.

Wisconsin producers will see activity on the project soon. The researchers will begin to identify 200 dairies to participate in the research as early as January. Once those dairies are chosen, management teams will be formed to gather real-world data, and will begin to help par-

ticipating producers manage reproduction right away.

"There's a big Extension component to the proposal that calls for strong collaboration with Wisconsin Extension faculty and the Extension specialists and researchers across the country. This was important to getting the grant," Cabrera says.

In addition to the on-farm work, researchers will use UW-Madison dairy research facilities to conduct controlled research on the impacts of nutrition and mastitis on reproduction.

Dairy scientists collaborating with Cabrera include Pam Ruegg, Paul Fricke, Randy Shaver, Kent Weigel and Milo Wiltbank. Five of the six collaborators are Extension specialists.

Competition for the grant was intense. Sixty-five "letters of intent" were sent to the USDA, and 22 proposals were submitted in hopes of getting a piece of a \$4 million pool.

"Ours was the top proposal," Cabrera says.

Source: UW College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

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