

The Agri-Gestion - Valacta alliance will benefit 50 privileged clients!

Manage your dairy herd with Agri-Lacta and improve your benefits

An initiative from CQRL, financed by MAPAQ



Agri-Gestion and Valacta, creators of the Agri-Lacta Suite, are looking for 50 dairy farms to implement computerized management of their herd. Objectives: improve your benefits through software management and measure the impact of its use on the dairy farm. In the long run, we aim to develop better, more user friendly management tools.

Participate in this project and you will receive:

- The Contact software from the Agri-Lacta Suite, an \$800 value

- 10 hours of on-farm advisory services with a Valacta advisor
- One day of group training on the Contact software
- Your herd's data for the last two years
- Data download via the internet during the year of implementation
- Access to the Agri-Gestion 1-800 assistance phone line for one year*
- One day of group advanced training
- An evaluation of results achieved on your farm following implementation

In exchange for this \$1400 service package and a unique opportunity to improve your benefits and management skills, your cost will only be \$400!

Enrol before October 17, 2006

For information or enrolment, contact:
Agri-Gestion at 1-800-463-7283
or by e-mail at service@agrigestion.ca

We would like to thank the *Conseil québécois des races laitières (CQRL)* and the *ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ)* for their generous support.

* Maintenance fee applicable on the second year

Agri-Réseau: a wide range of information at your fingertips!

Looking for expert opinion about the dairy sector? The latest research reports? Articles on a favourite subject? **Do you know Agri-Réseau?**

Agri-Réseau is a web site that provides a quick and free access to the knowledge and expertise of the Quebec agricultural and agri-food network. The information available is scientific or technical in nature: extension articles, technical sheets, statistics, research reports, etc., pertaining to more than 20 specific

domains, including **dairy cattle**. (Please note that most of the material is in French)

Information can be accessed under several fields (or key words): agro-environment, animal well-being, economics, rural engineering, milk quality, management, genetics, health, traceability. It's all there! Valacta dutifully files its technical and scientific papers on Agri-Réseau, just like most partners of the Quebec agricultural community.

You can also subscribe (free of charge), define your field(s) of interest with key words, and receive an e-mail every time a relevant article is posted on the web site.

Agri-Réseau is a collaboration between MAPAQ, the Centre de référence en agriculture et agro-alimentaire du Québec (CRAAQ) and all the organisations and individuals who contribute information. Try a visit at www.agrireseau.qc.ca

Dairy Knowledge at your fingertips

volume 1 issue 2 sept. 2006

valacta

The R&D Team: at the heart of Valacta's mission

Daniel Lefebvre, Ph.D., agr., Manager, R&D

The keystones of Valacta's mission are the development and diffusion of knowledge. They are also the power driving our Research and Development team. For many years now our seasoned specialists have been providing the PATLQ field personnel with new tools (software and others) as well as continued training.

The creation of Valacta as the Quebec centre of expertise for dairy production signifies that the scope of action of the R&D team has considerably widened. In fact, according to the company's new mandates, Valacta is responsible for communicating the main direction as it has been defined for the Quebec dairy industry by all concerned stakeholders. By virtue of its mandate, the R&D team will play a very important role in this mission. In addition, some of our experts will actually chair as well as follow-up several industry committees that bring together dairy stakeholders, in order to define those main directions.

The mandate of the R&D team is to:

- **Discover** new knowledge in dairy production through an ongoing technological watch as well as close collaboration with dairy production researchers.

- **Analyse** this new knowledge and its relevance within the Canadian context, as well as the performance indicators of the Quebec dairy industry, in order to identify possible improvements to the sector's competitiveness.

- **Develop** tools that enable producers and field personnel to apply new knowledge on the farm whether it is software, laboratory analyses, innovative management practices, etc.

- **Communicate** knowledge, both useful and practical, among the front-line advisors - including of course Valacta advisors and technicians. The possession of this knowledge allows them to provide Quebec dairy producers with top quality support, with the aim of ensuring the competitiveness and endurance of the Quebec dairy sector.

Meeting this challenge will require that our team engage experts in domains such as animal health and welfare as well as techno-economics management; not to perform on-farm counselling, but to act as a credible representative with partners in these specific domains. We can



then ensure that Valacta's endeavours are driven by an informed global vision of the stakes facing Quebec's dairy production, resulting from a consensus among all industry partners.

Summary

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Great savings, with optimal feeding

Bruno Gosselin, M.Sc., agr., Strategic Advisor

Do you feed enough milk and concentrates to your replacement heifers? It is the key to optimal growth, good health and better profits. But also, do you raise too many heifers? In this case, whatever their feeding costs, those extra heifers cost you too much.

It has to be repeated again and again: to get healthy breeding heifers, calving at 24 or 26 months with optimal weight, you need to feed them properly all along their growth. As seen in the **Born to Make Money** training course, when all costs are included, raising a heifer amounts to \$2500¹. This is why you need to raise only the number of heifers required to renew your herd, otherwise you are throwing away good money. Furthermore, when replacement is well managed, you can invest more time (and a little more money) to provide the best to the replacement heifers that you choose to keep.

Indeed, cutting down on heifer feeds is no saving at all, if it is detrimental to their growth. You need to serve quality feeds, in proper amounts and balanced according to the growth stage, in order to fulfil nutritional requirements:

1. Colostrum to the newborn is like magical potion to Obélix. Once you got it as an infant, the positive effects last a lifetime.

2. Milk feeding to calves: limiting the amount to 4 litres a day, is like taking away from kids half their morning glass of milk. The rule: a minimum of 6 to 7 litres, ideally 8 litres. Expect spectacular weight gains. Also, with adequate management, there is basically no diarrhea problem to speak of. Still not convinced? Read the article by my colleague Clément Blais, "Are my young calves dying from hunger?", in the October issue of *Le producteur de lait québécois* or *Quebec Farmer's Advocate* (Sept. 22).

3. Lastly, concentrates. The Agritel database tells us that, on average, raising an heifer to 26 months costs 398\$ in concentrates. This includes the cost of grain, meal, protein supplements and minerals, but does not take into account the amounts of milk or milk replacer fed.

How can you determine your own costs? Just fill the grid on page 3 (you can ask your Valacta advisor or technician for help with calculations or to discuss results):



1. Using your invoices for calves and heifer feeds, calculate the cost of one kg of each ingredient.
2. Enter the amount of each ingredient fed according to stage of growth
3. Multiply amounts by unit costs and add them up.

Of course, the amounts of concentrate required depend largely on the quality of forages fed to heifers. If your concentrate cost is \$420 per animal and you are satisfied with growth performance, then there is no real problem. On the other hand, a \$375 result may seem a bargain, but if the growth is so-so, you may be actually losing. To get satisfactory growth performance, do not hesitate



"On average, a heifer costs \$398 in concentrates."

to pay the right price. For a dairy farm with an inventory of 40 heifers, an extra \$20 per heifer represents only a \$370 difference over the year. So, never hesitate to feed the best to your heifers: they are your cows of tomorrow.

What is the cost of concentrates for your replacement heifers?

Replacement heifers on inventory				
Days at weaning				
Months at calving				
Feeding replacement heifers	Amount/heifer		Unit cost	Cost per heifer
	Per day	For the period		
Milk			0,65 \$/l	
Milk replacer			0,45 \$/l	
Concentrates fed - 0-3 months				
Grain or meal				
Supplement				
Mineral				
Concentrates fed - 3-6 months				
Grain or meal				
Supplement				
Mineral				
Concentrates fed - 6-15 months				
Grain or meal				
Supplement				
Mineral				
Concentrates fed - 15 months+				
Grain or meal				
Supplement				
Mineral				
Total per heifer				

¹Feed costs also include forrages! A heifer eats 6 tons of dry matter, for a cost of about \$840.

It is the extra heifers that cost too much

The real burdens to your purse are the heifers that you do not really need. For example, 20 extra heifers calving at 26 months represent a cost of \$8000 in concentrates, or \$3700 per year.

The **Born to Make Money** training course details the way to calculate the number of heifers required to renew your herd, and explains how you can reduce the culling rate, keep your healthy cows longer, and take full benefit of their more productive years (lactations 2, 3, 4...). This training

session will be back throughout Quebec as of November. Meanwhile, if you want to get ahead, ask your Valacta advisor or technician for our new management tool, the *Calculation sheet for replacement heifer requirements*. Fill up this form and discuss the results together. This is real "food for thought".

It is easy to provide the best feeds to your heifers at a reasonable cost. Optimising replacement and culling rate can be a bit

harder, but the benefits are quite substantial. So, sharpen that pencil!

This fall's "Cue Card":

Corn silage - ideal moisture content for harvesting: 65 %.

Uneven maturity? For practical tips, read *Quebec Farmers' Advocate* - August 25 Issue - article by Jean Brisson