



Make Time for Professional Development

DASC-133NP

—Dave Winston, Extension Dairy Scientist & Dairy Youth Program Coordinator; dwinston@vt.edu

“...time away can be healthy for individuals and the farm as a whole by providing time to recharge, gain a fresh perspective and be exposed to new ideas.”

Dairy farming is demanding work for owners, managers, and other employees. The normal to-do list never ends and one can never predict when a cow will get sick or equipment will break down. It can be difficult for members of the farm team to get away for off-the-farm activities and vacation. However, time away can be healthy for individuals and the farm as a whole by providing time to recharge, gain a fresh perspective and be exposed to new ideas.

Professional development can be useful at all levels within the farm organization. As a manager, it's important to participate in training opportunities, but it's also important to seek out training that will enhance employee performance. Granted, it takes time away from the farm to go to workshops, but participation has the potential to improve employee performance through increased knowledge and an intangible sense that employees are important to the operation.

Professional development opportunities come in many formats. Workshops and seminars offered by Virginia Cooperative Extension, The Dairy Alliance, milk cooperatives, USDA agencies, agricultural lenders, and others are usually presented in a format that allows one to participate during the day or in the evening. There are also more advanced, longer-term programs which are held over an extended period of time. Examples include Virginia Agriculture Leaders Obtaining Results (VALOR) and the Young Dairy Leaders Institute (YDLI). VALOR is a two-year program for adults in agriculture who want to develop their communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills in addition to broadening their knowledge of global and local agriculture in the pursuit of becoming an advocate for agriculture and a leader in the industry. YDLI is a project of the Holstein Foundation and is a nationally recognized three-phase leader and communication skills devel-

opment program for young adults (ages 22-45) working in the dairy industry, with all breeds of cattle. Milk cooperatives also offer young cooperator programs.

Professional development can provide many personal benefits including networking experiences, travel, and leadership development. It can also be an opportunity to take a break from the normal chores. Workers can increase their knowledge in many areas: production practices, technology, navigating regulatory requirements, and leadership development. Panel discussions and hallway chats are opportunities to learn from one's peers. Conferences and meetings are also a great way to build networks with other producers and allied industry professionals.

Professional development experiences should also benefit the farm business. Knowledge gained has the potential to increase efficiency and profitability. Training can help fine tune management skills to be a better boss. It can also increase awareness of risk management and conservation practices. Managers make more informed production and business management decisions using information gained and experiences shared.

When was the last time that you or someone from your farm or business took advantage of a professional development opportunity? Have employees been to an A.I. refresher course or to a workshop on milking management and mastitis control? Do you take employees with you to extension, cooperative, and DHIA meetings? If not, consider doing so. The time and expense of training are an investment in the future of the farm operation.

Links to example training programs:
Virginia Cooperative Extension: www.ext.vt.edu
VALOR: <http://valeadersor.com>
Young Dairy Leaders Institute (YDLI): <http://www.holsteinfoundation.org/YDLI/ydli.html>



Upcoming Events

See [VTDairy](#) for details.

March 3, 2020

Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset (Farm Stress program for producers), Halifax County

March 4, 2020

Dicamba Training Rocky Mount

March TBA

Pasture Group Farm visit Franklin County

March 21, 2020

Farm Safety Day Harrisonburg

April 4, 2020

Virginia Spring Holstein Show, Rockingham

April 18, 2020

92nd Annual Little All-American Show & Banquet, Blacksburg

April 18, 2020

Pittsylvania Youth Dairy Show

May 18, 2020

Hokie Cow Classic Golf Tournament, Blacksburg

July 19-24, 2020

2020 Annual Meeting and Professional Improvement Conference of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents; Trade show or sponsorship, contact aoverbay@vt.edu

If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.

For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VT Dairy—Home of the Dairy Extension Program on the web at: www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu.



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Reproductive Strategies for Dairy Herd Improvement – MOET or OPU-IVF?

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Producers can capitalize on available reproductive technologies to breed efficient, profitable cows. Multiple ovulation-embryo transfer (MOET) and ovum pickup and in-vitro fertilization (OPU-IVF) are two such technologies that offer producers with the ability to obtain offspring from high Net Merit females and bulls to achieve faster genetic progress.

MOET is your typical superovulation and embryo flush protocol completed in non-pregnant heifers and cows every 60 days. OPU-IVF involves technical expertise in ovum harvesting and laboratory expertise in ovum maturation and fertilization and embryo culture. As indicated in Table 1, OPU-IVF can generate 3-4 times more transferable embryos than MOET. Also, OPU can be completed more frequently, usually every 1-2 weeks, and it can be completed on prepubertal heifers and pregnant donors.

However, there are some limitations associated with the OPU-IVF process. Ovum pick-up may affect subsequent ability for cattle to ovulate naturally, although numerous OPU events can be completed before donor fertility is compromised. Another problem is that OPU-IVF embryos are less tolerant to freezing, so fresh embryos are preferred for transfer over frozen embryos.

The cost of freezing embryos and transferring embryos are similar between the two systems (\$50-75/embryo for each service), but other cost considerations differ between these systems (Table 1). The FSH stimulation and other drugs cost approximately \$300 per superovulation. Also included are costs for elite Net Merit semen (\$120) and embryo recovery

costs (\$300). Thus, with an average of 5 transferrable embryo recovered from the flush, your cost per embryo is \$150. For OPU-IVF, less FSH stimulation is achieved (approximately one-half the cost) and in some cases no FSH stimulation is completed. However, technical expertise with OPU is expensive (\$300 per donor) and the IVF process costs upwards of \$400. After adding 1-2 units of semen, your price per embryo can exceed \$200.

Thus, the protocol you choose will depend largely on the genetic goals for your herd. If your top Net Merit females have significantly greater indexes than the rest of the herd, then using OPU-IVF could rapidly amplify the genetics of your herd in just a few years. By receiving 3-4 times more embryos from OPU-IVF, a greater proportion of your herd could receive these high genetic merit embryos than if you used MOET. However, if the Net Merit of your herd is fairly similar between the top and bottom groups or if you don't have enough suitable recipients to handle fresh transfer of IVF embryos, perhaps MOET should be considered so you can take advantage of the lower cost per embryo and the ability to freeze away unused embryos for future use.

Regardless of the method you chose, the promise of accelerated genetic progress and profitability can be realized when using either reproductive technology.

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Table 1: Cost and Output per Reproductive Technology

	MOET	OPU-IVF
Events every 2 months	1	4-8
Embryos Possible every 2 months	4-6	12-25
Cost to produce 1 embryo	\$150	\$200-\$250

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