

Do's and Don'ts for Dairy Farmers When Facing Financial Difficulty During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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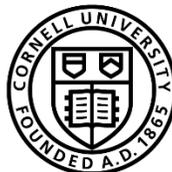
Each time the dairy industry experiences low milk prices, managers start looking for ways to save money. This is smart and something that all good businesses do. If less money is coming in, how do we cut down on how much money goes out without hurting the business in the long run? These decisions can be challenging when it comes to herd health expenses since the consequences of a bad decision might not be seen right away.

Here are a few *do's* and *don'ts* to consider as we all turn our attention again to reducing unnecessary expenses on the dairy. During this pandemic there are a few additional things to consider when making cost saving decisions like labor availability, social distancing, and cleaning protocols for high touch surfaces. These precautions add cost to dairy operations but are effective in limiting spread of COVID-19.

Do: Review your treatment protocols to make sure they align with efficacy standards. This includes screening the daily treatment sheets to make sure protocols are being followed. Altering drug doses and/or treatment frequencies rarely leads to improved treatment outcomes, but significantly adds to treatment expenses, increases the risk of having a drug residue, and wastes labor hours.

Don't: Decrease the dose or duration of therapy from the agreed upon protocols without your veterinarian's approval. Subtherapeutic use of medication reduces efficacy leading to increased treatment failure, poor animal performance, and increased risk of mortality.

Do: Eliminate steps in your vaccine protocol that lack sound disease prevention data. Have your herd health team review the current program. For disease threats faced by the dairy, does using the product make sense? Are those responsible for administering vaccines clear on what to do? Giving too many vaccines is a waste of money, time, and may increase the risk of complications. Giving too few vaccines may not provide your herd protection from diseases.



Don't: Eliminate vaccination steps that lead to lowered herd protection from known disease threats unless you can absorb the cost of a disease outbreak. Reducing vaccines to save money could potentially end up costing you a lot more should the disease present itself.

Do: Critically evaluate replacement animal inputs to ensure they are contributing to heifer performance. Track heifer performance regularly to make sure your replacement program is working and maximizing your investment in those inputs.

Don't: Make cuts in your heifer raising program that end up delaying their entry into the milking herd or decrease their performance as adults. Adding unnecessary time to first calving will increase your heifer raising costs significantly and may also reduce their future milking potential.

Do: Review your herd management procedures to look for ways to complete tasks with fewer people, a minimum of six feet of space between people doing the tasks, and appropriate PPE and cleaning procedures added to the tasks.

Don't: Take chances with your health or your employees' health in order to more quickly complete your herd health protocols. Consider the risk of contracting COVID-19 along with all the other safety concerns while working on the dairy. Also, don't take chances with your, your employee's, or your animals' safety by trying to complete a task with less than the necessary number of people needed to do the job without injury to the animals or people doing the job.