

~Dairy Details~

Produced by Northern Valley Dairy Production Medicine Center

900 N Wabasha, Plainview, MN 55964

(507) 534-4356 or 1-888-534-4026

northernvalley900@gmail.com

'Tis The Season

As the holiday season approaches, have you considered what you are thankful for? With today's dairy economy, you might think you have very little to be thankful for. Being both a dairy veterinarian and a dairy farmer's wife, I know firsthand why it's hard to have a positive, thankful attitude. Often during the past year during a herd check or DA surgery, I've looked around our farm and thought to myself "Why do we do this for a living?". It's actually a valid question about dairy farming, considering how difficult it is to make a profit, the hard work and long hours, and all the other challenges that come with farming. But, I always come back to that question with the same answer... Because I like the cows, the people, and agriculture! I am proud to be a part of feeding the world. Being a "glass half full" type girl, I think as dairy farmers we can all find at least one thing to be thankful for this holiday season.

As a dairy veterinarian, a dairy farmer's wife, and a part-time dairy farmer, I'm thankful for...

1. Uddertech waterproof coveralls: I don't know dairy farmers or veterinarians ever delivered a calf, replaced a uterine prolapse, or kept from be bathed in manure during pregnancy checks without these things. Being able to hose myself down when I'm covered in manure is awesome. And, I stay much dryer, which is essential when we live in cold Minnesota.
2. Technology: I can't imagine being a vet back in the "olden days" when Dr.'s Bennett and Nigon started practicing without the technology we have today. Technology has made our lives much easier and we are able to do a lot of things much more efficiently. Dairy farmers have all sorts of tools at their finger tips to get more done in a day, be better managers, and hopefully make better profits. Computer programs like DairyComp 305 help us manage cows and spits out all sorts of data that help us make more educated decisions on our dairies. Genomic testing has grown tremendously on dairy farms over the last 10 years. Knowing a heifer calf's future performance as a baby lets you decide if she is worth investing the time and feed into. Technology has also changed the way cattle veterinarians practice over the years. I find that my cell phone, iPad and ultrasound are basically glued to my body everyday. Cell phones and iPads are instrumental in helping us keep good communication between veterinarians, clients, our office and other members of our dairies' management teams. Ultrasounds help us be more accurate in diagnosing pregnant and open cows, finding twins, and telling if a cow is going to have a heifer or a bull calf.
3. Warm vet rooms: Frozen hands during surgery really hinders a vet's ability to do their job. Wet surgical instruments also freeze pretty fast during a DA surgery in a freestall barn on a -15 degree day. I'm very thankful for farms that have a dedicated, heated (or at least out of the elements) area for veterinarians to perform surgeries.
4. Employees: Farm employees are the fuel that power our dairy farms. I'm very thankful that our farm has wonderful employees. We certainly could not do it all with just family. They allow me to spend

time with my husband at home, not just at the farm! They help us out on holidays and make it possible for us to even take a vacation once in a while. The same is true for the employees that I work with on your farms every day. They make my job easier and more enjoyable and most likely yours too.

5. Calf hutch bedding windows: Do you raise your calves in hutches? Do you have Calf-Tel hutches with bedding windows? If you don't, you don't know what you're missing! Half of our hutches have bedding windows and we love them! They make keeping hutches clean and well bedded so much easier. Now, all I want for Christmas is ALL of our hutches to have bedding windows!
6. Harvest: Besides the milk in our bulk tanks, harvest is our pay day. This year, I'm thankful that both our hay crop and our corn and beans provided at least average to above average yields. We were fortunate to avoid the huge soaking rains last spring, to have above average temperatures in September following a very cool August, and fall weather that allowed us to finish harvest by a reasonable date. And most importantly everyone remained safe.
7. Being tall: I'm thankful for being able to reap the benefits of being tall my entire life. Being a 6'1" female is pretty close to the perfect build for being a cow vet (except when banging your head on a milk line in a stanchion barn). There aren't too many cows that are too tall for me to palpate. I have yet to have to find a straw bale or a stool to stand on to preg check a cow. Having long, skinny arms also comes in handy for a nasty calving with a head back or rear end first.
8. Rural living: I grew up in a small farming community of less than 1000 people. I got a taste of city life while attending the University of Minnesota for 7 years. Although the St. Paul campus is pretty quiet and "farm kid friendly", it definitely was no Nicollet, MN. Yes, it was nice being 5 minutes away from any type of restaurant you could want to eat at, a grocery store, a mall or a Gopher game. But, I do not miss parallel parking on the street, driving in I-94 rush hour traffic on Friday afternoon, or the marijuana smell wafting into my apartment from my neighbors. I'm thankful for not having to fight traffic on my way to work in the morning, being surrounded my fields of corn and alfalfa and the smell of cow manure.
9. Family: The holiday season usually means family bonding. I guess you can decide for yourself if this is a good thing or a bad thing. I have to say for myself, I enjoy it. Of course, our family gatherings do include at least a beer or two, so that helps. I find myself appreciating family more and more. I am less likely to take my parents for granted now that I live two hours away, especially since my mom still takes care of my 12 yr-old 4-H cow that I just cannot part with. I'm very lucky that my in-laws have allowed me to use our farm as a "guinea pig" multiple times since graduating from veterinary school. These experiences have truly helped me become a better veterinarian for the rest of my clients, and for that I'm very thankful.
10. My job(s): I'm thankful for the opportunity to be a cow vet, a dairy farmer's wife and part-time dairy producer. When you enjoy doing what you're doing as much as I do, it truly doesn't feel like work. And as much as I love cows, it is really the people who make this job and industry what it is, making me also thankful for you!



Happy Holidays!

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