



Thomas Overton, professor of dairy management in Cornell University's department of animal science, shared perspective on assessing the opportunities, risks and return on investment associated with dairy technologies during the Western Dairy Management Conference.

NUTRITION & HEALTH

Practical approach key when choosing nutritional additives

Research demonstrating technology's effectiveness should be a primary consideration when determining what technologies to employ.

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Dr. Thomas Overton, professor of dairy management in Cornell University's department of animal science and director of PRO-DAIRY, presented a practical approach for assessing the opportunities, risks and return on investment associated with dairy technologies during the Western Dairy Management Conference.

Overton reviewed a model evaluating the improvements yielded by a dairy technology against the implementation costs and lost opportunity costs associated with foregoing the technology.

His model presented a framework for comparing the risks and payoffs of technologies requiring intensive capital outlays -- such as robotic milking systems or other types of parlor systems -- against more modest technology investments such as changes in management practices or nutritional management decisions, including the use of improved forms of nutrients such as hydroxy trace minerals in dairy cattle nutrition.

According to Overton, research that demonstrates a technology's

effectiveness should be a primary consideration when determining what technologies to employ.

Referencing advances in hydroxy trace minerals, Overton noted, "Producers should consider an ingredient's biological mode of action and the animal's level of response when considering a technology used in feed. The data for use of improved trace minerals, including hydroxy forms, look good, and yet we continue to under-utilize these in dairy rations. Often, we are looking for the silver bullet; frankly, I don't think that there are too many silver bullets. We need to utilize sound, research-backed strategies in our nutritional programs that project positive return on investment.

"I think that we are more likely to make what are referred to as Type 2 errors -- or failing to implement something that would have yielded a positive return on

investment -- when it comes to adoption of nutritional technologies,” Overton said. These types of decisions generally pose less overall risk of a negative outcome for the overall business as the technologies tend to be lower cost and lower risk.

Beyond the use of statistical principles, Overton said the “Constellation of Evidence” associated with a given technology should be examined. Comparing multiple levels of evidence can improve confidence in the technology implementation decision-making process.

Finally, Overton advised producers not to overlook key advisers, including veterinarians, nutritionists, extension services and universities.

“Whether response to a technology is transformative or subtle, dairy producers need to employ a thorough process before making a change in their management practices, operations and nutritional management strategies,” he said.

Overton’s presentation was sponsored by Micronutrients. His remarks may be viewed online at https://youtu.be/Ur_jycgorbM .

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