Dairy Management Software

Accurate and current records are critical to the successful management of today's dairy farms. As more dairy farmers buy computers for this purpose, they are faced with the choice of purchasing the dairy management software best suited to their needs.

Software choices

The main dairy management programs in use in Western Canada are listed in the table below. They range from simple programs that keep and display records, to fully developed farm management programs with direct feeding and milking interfaces. Dairy software packages can be grouped as follows:

- **Simple event recording and record display**. Plotplus (Alberta DHI Services) is an example in this category.
- **Full-featured management programs.** These provide a wide range of production, pedigree, and event transaction processing. This type of program includes DairyCHAMP (University of Minnesota), Dairyman (Agpro), and VAMPP (On Golden Line Dairy).
- **Integrated programs** are connected electronically to milk meters and grain feeding systems, in addition to providing services similar to those in the full-feature management programs. Examples are Galaxy (Alfa Laval) and Dairyplan (Westfalia).

Each program has it's own features, advantages and disadvantages. Each farm operation will have different requirements for their record keeping. Determining the specific functions and features required for a given farm is critical in the selection of an appropriate dairy farm management package. Some considerations in purchasing dairy management software packages are:

- What are the functions you need? What is important for your farm operation?
- How easy is the program to learn? Software should be easy to run!
- How clear, concise and easy to use is the accompanying manual?
- How easy is it to retrieve and analyze the data?
- What support services are provided?
- What is the cost of the program?
- What features are planned to be added to the program in the future?

How much time is involved?

Most software packages are not difficult to learn. Some basic computer knowledge and approximately 10 hours of time are enough to install the software, load the herd information and become well oriented on a user friendly dairy management software system. Fifteen to thirty minutes a day thereafter will allow for the maintenance of a functional management system.

	PROGRAM	DISTRIBUTOR	LOCATION	PHONE / FAX	COST
A	Dairyman v4.3	Agpro Software	Victoria BC	(604)652-8557 (604)652-2433	$595
B	DairyPlan v 4.2	Westfalia Systemat	Elk Grove IL	(708)437-8660 (708)437-8724	$US299
C	VAMPP v3.4	On Golden Line Dairy	Picture Butte AB	(800)661-6601 (604)853-2545	$1000-$1300
D	DairyCHAMP v1.2	University of Minnesota	St. Paul MN	(612)625-7045 (612)625-6241	$1000-$1500
E	PlotPlus v1.0	Alberta DHI Services	Edmonton AB	(800)252-7530 (403)455-2195	$260
F	Galaxy v2.07	Alfa Laval Agri, Inc.	Kansas City MO	(705)741-3100 (705)741-3151	$995

Program Comparison

BC Dairy Herd Improvement Services has recently evaluated the dairy management software programs listed in the table on page 1. The aim of this review was not to cite a single program as being superior, but rather to offer an unbiased listing of the properties of each package, allowing herd owners to select a program which best meets their needs.

A wide range of details on each of the programs was examined. The quality of service provided by each supplier was not evaluated. However, in general, service was excellent for all 6 programs.

Results of the evaluation are summarized in the table below and include ratings on different aspects of program setup and usability, information transfer, reports, record definition and degree of customizability. Each of the ratings is itself a summary of several questions on the details of the program. The questions on which the ratings are based include: "Does the program have a special facility (compared to the other programs)?", and "Does the program offer better or worse facility compared to a good program?"

How to compare the different ratings:

1. Determine the type of program that you require :
   a. simple record display and event recording;
   b. full featured, or;
   c. integrated program.

2. Evaluate the importance of the different criteria to your particular needs. You may place high value on information transfer compared to having a wide range of records defined in the program. You may want to customize your program, or you might like to use it as it comes. If you determine what you want out of the program, then you will stand the best chance of matching your needs with suitable software.

Access to DHI and other computers

Electronic downloading of milk recording information reduces the time spent on data entry by the herd owner, veterinarian, nutritionist or the herd management consultant. For herds participating in milk recording programs, herd production data is available electronically on DHI bulletin boards or on data disks mailed with test-day results.

Dairy management software can be an invaluable help in analyzing dairy farm records. Chances are, no package will provide *absolutely all* the services and features that you may want, but there probably is one that will satisfy most of the needs of your operation. The best way to evaluate all the features of a package is to try a demonstration version of the program on your computer. Most software companies will provide a 'demo' copy.

If you need additional information, or would like a copy of the BCDHIS report please contact the author.

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BC Dairy Herd Improvement evaluation compiled by Peter Parke, 1993.

PROGRAM	A	B	C	D	E	F
PROGRAM SETUP / GENERAL USE						
Ease of Installation	8	10	7	9.5	9	9
User Friendliness	8.5	9	9.5	8.5	9.5	7
Operating Manual	9	8	7	9.5	6.5	7.5
Menu Structure	8	8	9.5	7.5	7	8
INFORMATION TRANSFER						
DHI Interface	9	8	10	10	6.5	7
Other Interfaces	9.5	8	9.5	8.5	3	8
Data Access/Security	9	8	9.5	8.5	3	7.5
General Record Entry	7.5	7	8	8.5	5	7.5
REPORTS / RECORDS						
General	8.5	7	8.5	8	5	7
Graphics	7	7.5	9	8	8	4
Statistics	0	3	4	8	3	0
RECORD DEFINITION						
Action Lists / Flags	7.5	8	9	9	0	7.5
Generated Forms	10	3	8.5	8	0	0
Feeding	0	9.5	4	6	0	9
Genetic	10	4	7.5	3.5	0	0
Production	8	7.5	8.5	7.5	6.5	7
Reproduction	10	6.5	10	8	3	4
Veterinary/Diagnosis	6.5	5	10	9	0	7
CUSTOMIZABILITY	7	9	8	10	6	7