

24% pregnancy rate the old-fashioned way

At a time when tail-chalking seems the norm for large herd reproduction programs, Soaring Eagle Dairy has stuck with the tried and true method of visual heat detection on their 1,030-Holstein herd. A family operation, Soaring Eagle Dairy is owned by Jim and Sandie Fitzgerald and their three daughters and their families; Kelly Goehring, Julie Maurer and Stacy Klotz.

Achieving a 24 percent pregnancy rate is no easy task, but the team at Soaring Eagle, which includes NorthStar Cooperative reproductive specialist Scott Woepse makes it look easy. “Scott acts like this is his own farm,” noted Kelly, Julie and Stacy. “He’s always curious and asking questions about what’s going on. Between Scott and our veterinarian they are the driving force behind our reproduction program.”

Everyone at the farm is responsible and involved in watching for heats and recording what they see and that is the key to obtaining pregnancies. “We rely on everyone to do heat detection,” said Kelly. “Everyone carries a pocket notebook when we walk the pens to keep track of cows in heat, cows with discharge or anything else. Then the information is



A member of the Soaring Eagle Dairy team since 1991, Scott Woepse, NorthStar Cooperative reproductive specialist breeds more than 14,000 animals annually.

transferred to our milker communication book. It works to have a lot of people watching the cows, but the real key is writing it down and we have a tool in place that encourages that.”

Soaring Eagle provides a monthly incentive based on the SCC of the herd. The amount of that incentive is determined by the number of times someone milks each month. The communication book that is used for heat detection is what Julie consults to determine how many times a month someone has been in the parlor working.

The reproduction program at Soaring Eagle includes all cows being bred A.I. after a 75 day waiting period. Vet checks are performed weekly and fresh cows are checked at about 60 days fresh to ensure they are in good breeding condition and not cystic. At this time a GnRH shot is typically given to begin a Presynch/Ovsynch protocol.

“We give the shots for Ovsynch,” said Kelly and Julie, “that way we are sure it gets done. We’ve heard too many horror stories about shots not happening or not getting to the right cows. Shot compliance is critical to success.”

Over the past two years, many changes have been implemented which have helped improve the pregnancy results at Soaring Eagle. The timing of Lutalyse® shots in the Ovsynch program has changed from 14 days to 11-12 days apart. Weekly herd checks; a more aggressive approach to heat detection; converting to sand bedding; and using ultrasound have all played a role in obtaining the 24 percent pregnancy rate.

Soaring Eagle pregnancy checks with ultrasound at 27 days, allowing for a quicker return to a synchronization program if a cow is open. Additionally, the ultrasound allows detection of twins, which is important to dry cow management. “We had found that a lot of cows



The Fitzgerald Family: (Back:) Sandie and Jim Fitzgerald, Jeremy and Stacy Klotz. (Middle): Rick and Julie Maurer, Kelly and Brian Goehring. (Front): Hailey and Kelsey Maurer; Nathan, Brooke and Austin Goehring.

with twins left the herd due to health problems,” said Kelly. “By using ultrasound we know a cow is carrying twins and we are able to change our management. We dry them off a little earlier and put them in the steam-up group earlier to keep them healthier. As a result we’ve had fewer cows leave the herd.”

Along with relying on Scott for the reproduction program, the Fitzgeralds also count on Dale Sabo, NorthStar Cooperative Select Mating Service (SMS) evaluator to provide mating recommendations. “When you go from 60 cows to a bigger operation like this; using SMS is just easier,” notes Stacy. The Fitzgerald’s bull selection focuses on high milk production and good feet and legs and udders. Recently the farm started using bulls that offer more medium sized cows because the cows were getting too big for the facilities. With these criteria in place, the sires currently being used are 7HO7466 Moscow, 7HO7463 Pontiac, 7HO7602 Maven, 7HO6758 Mr Sam, 7HO8081 Planet and 7HO7838 Glenn.

In 2005, Soaring Eagle, along with six other individuals created Heifer Authority, a custom heifer growing operation in Colorado. With the capacity to house 4,200 animals; the facility currently houses all the owners’ animals, along with animals from other dairymen

around the country. The Fitzgeralds send their young stock west at five months of age and the animals are returned back to Newton, Wisconsin two months prior to calving.

“We definitely have better animals by raising them out west,” noted Julie. “We’re getting healthier, better condi-

make it to our herds person in Colorado,” noted Julie.

With over a 1,000 cows, 1,500 acres and a custom heifer raising facility the Fitzgeralds have a lot to do and count on outside people to help. Regularly the Fitzgeralds conduct a team meeting with their outside consultants. “Everybody brings something to the table at those meetings,” agreed Kelly, Julie and Stacy. “It’s amazing how everyone works together to make our

dairy run better. These team meetings are very valuable.”

“As owners we’re treating cows and we don’t have the time to do everything and that’s one of the reasons we work with outside people,” stated Julie. “It’s nice to have Scott do the breeding on the farm. We know he’ll get it done and done well and we’re not sure we could do as good of a job as he does. He also does a lot of extra things around here. We don’t expect any of it, but we know he cares about our success when he does.”

For more information on Soaring Eagle Dairy visit soaringeagle.com. For information on NorthStar’s reproduction services in your area call 1.800.631.3510. ★

“Scott and Dale take their responsibility here for reproduction and matings very seriously and as a result, treat our farm like it’s their own herd.”

tioned animals. We have fewer calving problems and we are able to calve them at 21 – 22 months of age. We never used to think about calving heifers out before 24 – 26 months of age and now we are able to do it sooner and financially that’s huge. Now we get a half year of milk sooner.”

Mating recommendations for heifers are also provided through SMS and gender SELECTed™ semen is included in the program. “Dale was instrumental in helping us set-up our mating program in Colorado. He took the lead on making sure all the mating recommendations

Soaring Eagle Dairy

- Newton, Wisconsin
- 1,030 Cows
- 28,334M 1,061F 877P
- Double 16 parallel parlor
- 24% pregnancy rate
 - Visual heat detection and Ovsynch/Presynch
- 1,500 acres
- 21-full time family members and associates
- NorthStar Consultants:
 - Scott Woepse, reproductive specialist
 - Dale Sabo, SMS evaluator

Dale Sabo named Select Sires Evaluator of the Year

Dale Sabo, of DePere, Wisconsin, is Select Sires’ 2008 Select Mating Service™ (SMS™) Evaluator of the Year. This national award is presented to an evaluator that exemplifies the qualities that make SMS known world-wide as the premier mating program in the industry. The recipient must have years of superior service, a history of high-quality evaluations and the ability to build and maintain successful relationships with dairy producers.

The key to designing genetic business plans on today’s dairy operations starts with skilled, experienced evaluators. “Dale’s influence, integrity and cow knowledge have been key to the success that NorthStar and Select Sires have enjoyed in Wisconsin,” commented Gary Smith, general manager for NorthStar Cooperative.

Sabo was born and raised on a family dairy near Green Bay, Wisconsin, and earned a bachelor’s degree in dairy science from the University of Wisconsin in 1968. While in college, Dale was a member of the University of Wisconsin dairy judging team. He began working in the industry as a youth extension agent and coached very successful 4-H dairy judging teams and dairy quiz bowl teams. Sabo began Sunrise-Sunset Holsteins, and from 1974 through 1986, developed numerous

Excellent cows and district show champions, ultimately earning many premier breeder and premier exhibitor awards. Additionally, Sabo is an accredited dairy judge and has judged numerous county fairs and district Holstein shows and served as the associate judge of the Wisconsin State Junior Fair Holstein Show. Sabo began his career in A.I. at Genex Cooperative, working with the mating program. He then joined Alta Genetics as a sire analyst, where he was responsible for the acquisition of Norriellake Cleitus Luke. In 1993, Sabo joined the Select Sires family at NorthStar Cooperative as an SMS evaluator. ★



Lon Peters (right), vice president dairy sire product services manager for Select Sires, awarded Dale Sabo (left) with the 2008 Select Sires Evaluator of the Year award.