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# Cows on DHI test: 4 consecutive years of growth

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. While this statement may be overused in today's dairy business environment, DHI records measure a variety of performance factors – from milk production to SCC to dry period length to herd turnover to heifer reproduction – that allow dairy producers to effectively manage their businesses.

Even though dairy producers enjoyed "high" milk prices in 2007, input costs climbed steadily. And with today's declining milk prices and steady to increasing costs on the supply side (resulting in a record low milk:feed ratio), it becomes even more challenging to make proper management decisions for dairy operations. DHI records remain the rock-solid pillar in dairy financial analysis and planning. No other record keeping entity has the positive impact for growth on the dairy as DHI records.

Despite the country's declining dairy cow and dairy herd numbers, the number of cows on DHI programs has grown for four consecutive years. In 2003, 4.071 million cows were on DHI programs; in 2007, 4.415 million cows were on DHI programs. These numbers reflect 8.4% (see Table 1) growth

– very impressive, considering a period of volatile dairy economics and shrinking dairy cow population. The DHI system credits this growth to its accurate, detailed, concise and proper information generated to manage dairies.

Today's DHI system is not your "Father's Oldsmobile." Cows on DHI testing programs come in all herd sizes. By offering flexible, innovative programs, all types and sizes of dairies can effectively use DHI records to better manage their dairy businesses.

The investment in DHI programs far outweighs the expense. A 2006 dairy business analysis summary found that the average expense for DHI records is less than 0.5% of all expenses on the average dairy farm. Yet, DHI records account for business decisions that affect 42% of the total dairy expenses and 84% of the average dairy farm's income.

Our current dairy economic roller coaster continues to challenge dairy producers in making proper management decisions. Maintain stability in your dairy operation by relying on and effectively using DHI programs.

**Table 1. Cows on DHI Programs**

