



# HerdHQ Case Study:

## Herd Expansion. Hidden Transition Losses

*This case study is based on real DRMS testing data and herd-level outcomes from a Northeast herd. While the farm is not identified, the scenario reflects actual analysis and results, showing how HerdHQ tools like DairyDepot and Fresh Cow Index can surface key improvement areas and support confident, data-driven decisions.*

## Background

A 1,800 cow herd in the Northeast began expanding in February by freshening a large group of heifers, reducing culling and adding a few purchases. At the start of the process, the herd was producing just under 29,500 lbs. of milk.

## The Problem

- Situation: The herd was expanding and wanted to monitor management factors to avoid any pitfalls before they became more serious.
- Challenge: With more animals calving, there was a stronger need to determine whether a transition problem existed and to know where to look for answers.

## The Solution

With HerdHQ, the team used **MilkMetrics** and **DairyDepot** to establish benchmark comparisons and build a dashboard to evaluate their transition program.

- They used **MilkMetrics** to compare their herd to other 1,000-3,000 cow herds, with 214 herds in their peer group.
  - ◊ The herd ranked around the 70th percentile for Rolling Herd Average milk, but fat was in the bottom 30th percentile and protein was at 60th percentile.
  - ◊ First test day milk had dropped an average of 3 lbs. from the prior month.
  - ◊ Average milk for second and greater lactation cows at 1-40 days had been declining since early fall, dropping about 10 lbs.
  - ◊ An alert was established when milk from 1-40 DIM dropped by 3 lbs. from the prior test for the herd and each lactation.



- After noticing the drop in 1-40 DIM milk, the team set up a transition dashboard using **DairyDepot**, with **Fresh Cow Index (FCI)** as a key focus.
  - ◊ FCI compares first test day Energy Corrected Milk production to predicted performance. FCI values under 100 indicate underperformance.
  - ◊ FCI values were reviewed by calving month and lactation group and remained under 100 for multiple lactations over an extended period, continuing to decline.
  - ◊ This indicated potential production and economic losses that were not previously recognized.
  - ◊ The FCI Annual Report showed cows with FCI values below 100 were more than twice as likely to leave the herd.

- Additional review showed:
  - ◊ Increasing new SCC infections on first test, nearing 20% in the spring
  - ◊ Dropping 1-40 DIM production by lactation
  - ◊ Higher calving difficulty during summer months
  - ◊ Gestation lengths were shorter by 4 days or more in 35% of lactation 1 cows
- ◊ Overall SCC was trending higher, while average days dry remained around 60 with a low percentage of cows with short (<40) or long (>70) days dry
- ◊ As the herd expanded, FCI declined through late summer, with potential ECM losses bottoming out at 20 lbs. (lactation 1), 7.5 lbs. (lactation 2), and 23 lbs. (lactation 3+) per cow

## The Results

### ↑\$12,481 \$12,481 added in first 40 days of lactation

- As of the November test, improved FCI values resulted in \$312 in additional daily revenue for the 135 cows that calved that month, based on \$20/cwt milk.

### ↑FCI Improved FCI during herd expansion

- FCI values began improving with cows calving in September, after the majority of herd expansion had occurred. All three lactation groups were now averaging above 100 FCI.
- The herd reached its expansion peak in November at 2,360 cows, adding 560 cows during the expansion period.

### ↑Less Low FCI Lower performance tied to FCI values below 100

- Cows with FCI values below 100 were culled at more than twice the rate of cows above 100.
- Those cows also had projected 305-day ECM records over 3,000 lbs. lower than cows with FCI values above 100.



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