

Proactive Cow Care Ensures Success

Make a commitment to your herd's reproductive program with the 100-Day Contract Dairy Wellness Plan

Success is defined as the achievement of something desired, planned or attempted¹. For dairy producers who desire a healthy herd, high fertility and pregnancy rates, peak milk production and more, simply wanting these things can't happen without the "planned or attempted" part of the definition.

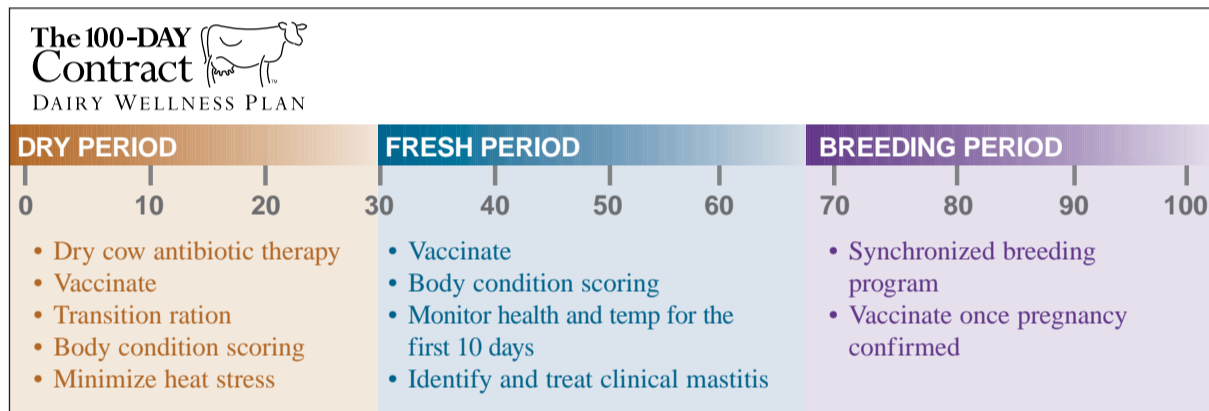
To write his No. 1 international bestseller "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," Dr. Stephen R. Covey reviewed 200 years' worth of literature on success. He used this base of research to help formulate his approach to effectiveness.

Covey's second habit, "Begin with the end in mind," illustrates the point that you need to have a detailed plan before you can attempt a successful endeavor. Whether it's building a house or expanding a dairy operation, you need to envision the desired results and the important steps it will take you to get there. This preplanning helps guide your activities to reach your goal.

Critical Components

The contract is essentially a planned dairy management program to optimize early pregnancies. For each cow, the 100-Day Contract focuses on the critical period of 30 days before freshening to 70 days after. Within the dry, fresh and breeding periods, protocols are put in place to reduce the potential for diseases, manage body condition, maximize nutrition intake and increase opportunities for pregnancy.

"A crucial point of the program is for dairy producers to be pre-emptive and proactive," says Belschner's colleague, Mark Kirkpatrick, DVM, MS, dairy senior veterinarian, Pfizer Animal Health. "Start by being proactive in addressing dry cow nutrition, dry cow comfort and the general well-being of each cow." He then recommends that once a cow freshens, monitor the cow for 10 to 14 days to get the earliest possible indication that an animal needs attention.



The 100-Day ContractSM Dairy Wellness Plan, a management program for herd health, is a prime example of how dairy producers can bring Covey's theory to life. "The 100-Day Contract helps dairy producers organize the efforts they're putting into their dry, fresh and breeding programs," says Austin Belschner, DVM, dairy veterinary operations manager, Pfizer Animal Health. "The ultimate success we want producers to have is more pregnant cows. In fact, we want to see 50 percent of cows pregnant the first time we try to breed them. That's an aggressive goal."

Belschner and his colleagues reviewed breeding programs and success rates and determined that even if the best programs were applied well, first-cycle pregnancy rates would still just be in the 25 to 30 percent range; that left 75 percent of the cows still open. The team analyzed this segment and realized many had problems associated with fresh cow disease complex. Metritis, mastitis, fetal membrane issues, milk fever and even calf death plagued these cows. "Problems at calving was one of the reasons cows weren't becoming pregnant," Belschner says. "We needed a good fresh cow program to treat cows appropriately, aggressively and quickly at calving to help manage these problems."

The team also decided just having a good fresh cow program wasn't going to be enough to push the first-service pregnancy rate into the 50 percent range. Proactive prevention of these problems during the dry period, proper and timely vaccinations, and a good transition feeding program are all part of the plan. The team expanded on the 100-Day Contract theme developed by Jim Spain, PhD, of the University of Missouri-Columbia, to include animal health needs and protocols (see sidebar).

"When you're dealing with metabolic athletes like today's dairy cows, you don't have time to wait and see how they're going to do," Kirkpatrick adds. "You have to identify potential problems early and make a difference. Then you can move on to a synchronized breeding program and start to see great results."

Successful implementation of the 100-Day Contract can result in the following:

- Reduced incidence of clinical mastitis at freshening
- Reduced incidence and severity of coliform mastitis
- Standardized treatment procedures
- 100 percent service rate for the first estrous cycle after the voluntary waiting period
- Higher lactation and lifetime milk production
- Improved cow health during the transition period
- Same-day identification and treatment of fresh cow problems
- Fewer "crashes" of early lactation cows
- Improved labor utilization
- More pregnant cows
- New, quicker measures of reproductive performance

"The end result is that we have a cow who's ready to conceive in a more timely fashion," Kirkpatrick adds. "She's ready to maximize her milk yield. And producers are in a position to increase numbers of new stock to sell or keep while minimizing total culls, which all rolls into increased profits."

As the nation's number of dairy cows decreases—USDA figures show a 16 percent decrease since 1980, and 50,000 fewer since last year—the value put on pregnant cows is even greater. In addition, Canada has been a primary, cost-efficient source for replacement cows, but producers no longer have that resource in the wake of BSE.

Measurement Makes the Difference

One aspect of dairy management that the 100-Day Contract helps to advance is measurement. Whether you're managing 50 or 5,000 cows, "you can't manage if you don't measure," notes Kirkpatrick. "Many times, we're so caught up in managing that we fly by on our perceptions rather than taking the time to conduct real measurements. That just doesn't work in today's dairy industry."

The 100-Day ContractSM Manager is a computer software program that allows you to visualize reproduction and culling in the dairy operation. It's a tool for monitoring, measuring and making changes based on relevant data. The data generated from participating in aspects of the 100-Day Contract is what differentiates this program within the industry.

"We use baseline data from the majority of existing dairy recordkeeping systems," says Kirkpatrick. "Producers can now look at standardized measurements in shorter time intervals, and veterinarians can review and compare client results no matter what system they're using."

Since most existing dairy recordkeeping systems are measured on an annual basis, it was difficult for producers to track their goals and make productive adjustments to their operation throughout the year. The 100-Day Contract Manager offers cohort (weekly, biweekly, monthly or bimonthly formats) and annualized analysis, so there's an opportunity for continuous review, revision and refinement.

What it comes down to, Belschner adds, is that dairy producers always want more pregnant cows. "But the reality is reproduction isn't easy," he adds. "Getting cows pregnant is a complicated process; one that takes good management, precise feeding, proper handling of a cow at calving, a breeding program that manages the cycle of the cow and more."

What helps with managing these details is the cohort and annualized planning components that the 100-Day Contract offers. Producers have the tools to follow Stephen Covey's example of "begin with the end in mind" to make daily progress toward their goals. However, Belschner reminds producers that compliance with program components is key to their success.

"The 100-Day Contract is not a quick and easy way to get more pregnant cows," he emphasizes. "It's a way of doing business, a way of dairying. If producers are ready to make a commitment, then we can get to that 50 percent first-cycle rate."

For more information on the 100-Day Contract and how to participate, contact your veterinarian or local Pfizer Animal Health territory manager, or visit www.100daycontract.com.

100-Day Contract Historical Perspective

In 1996, Jim Spain, PhD, University of Missouri-Columbia associate professor of animal science, was asked to speak at a seminar on the effects of nutrition on reproduction in dairy cattle. As he was preparing for his presentation, he likened the approach he was taking to the 100-day contract that House Speaker Newt Gingrich presented to the American people a couple of years earlier.

Gingrich's plan for Congress was to change the way they think, the way they do business, the way they treat the American people. His vision was to change failed methods and create a new partnership with the people. His first act laid out 10 bills to be passed within the first 100 days of Congress that year, which is where the name originated.

"I took Gingrich's concept and applied it to what we were defining," Spain says. "We looked at nutritional and environmental ways to improve a cow's transition and reproduction functions. It was time for dairy producers to expand their thinking to encompass how they care for the cow during 30 days pre-partum and 70 days postpartum. It's more than just the few days around calving that are critical."



Pfizer Animal Health

1. The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition 1985; 1214.

