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Breathe Deep and Share the Road with Farmers

As a kid, I spent many days perched precariously on the fenders of my dad's John Deere tractor, traveling from one field to the next. Riding on the fender was not safe and is heartily discouraged now. But that's what rural kids did. You held on for dear life. It was a rural fact of life.

Fortunately farm safety is a higher priority now than it was back then. Tractors have grown much, much bigger, as farms have too. I think farmers drive them with more respect for their power than they did 40 or 50 years ago.

Tractors aren't the only things that are bigger. Other farm machinery—planters, sprayers, combines, you name it—have likewise grown to meet new farming demands. When I was riding around on the fender, people were making a living on farms 100 to 200 acres in size. A farm 10 times that size now is not unusual. Double it again for farms in western Canada.

In Ontario, or anywhere else in Canada, drivers are bound to encounter big farm machinery on the road. What should you do? Take a deep breath, thank the farmer driving it for producing your food and if you're behind him or her, pass when it is safe.

The Grain Farmers of Ontario are embarking on a new road safety awareness campaign. A lot of their work occurs in the spring, and at this time of year they have a particular interest in making sure the roads are safe...for you, and them.

The grain farmers campaign, which kicks off April 1 with e-support at www.gfo.ca/roadsafety, emphasizes not just the need for citizens to recognize farmers' rights to the road, but also, farmers' need to be defensive drivers.

Defensive driving is the most valuable lesson mothers and fathers can give to daughters and sons learning to drive.

Stay out of blind spots. Don't run yellow lights. Yield to pedestrians. Respect your vehicle's power and recognize driving is a privilege.

The road safety campaign is also reminding people that a farm vehicle is part of a farmer's workplace. They want drivers to be respectful in allowing farmers to do their job.

That's a key point. Farming is a lifestyle, we've all heard that, but it's also a job. If farmers can't do their job producing food and sustaining the environment, we're all in trouble. We need to give them a break and exercise driving tolerance so they can move their machinery from field to field.

This is a particularly timely message. Spring has come early for the rest of us, and if the weather holds, it will also come early for farmers. If they can plant early, they will. Early planting usually means their plants grow stronger and ultimately provide higher yields.

Tips for Drying Stored Grain as Weather Improves

We have had a few good weeks for some farmers to get rid of some of their moisture in the stored grains.

OMAFRA's Helmut Speiser says natural air drying requires adequate airflow, above freezing temperatures and dry outside air. He says farmers also need a few other things to do the job right. Speiser says it is important that you run the fan at the right time. Running at the wrong time could end up adding moisture rather than taking it away. He says the best time for this area, this time of the year, is during daylight hours.

Our relatively soft winter and spring-like conditions have some farmers thinking about getting on the land. But OMAFRA's Helmut Speiser warns that storage pests have also liked this year's winter weather.

**WE WILL BE CLOSED
ON APRIL 6, 2012 FOR
GOOD FRIDAY.**

AUTOMATIC CALF FEEDERS

Technology has changed all facets of business, including the dairy industry. There has been a switch from component feeding and migration to TMR, tie stalls turned into free stalls, parlours turned into robots. One area of operation that has changed is the automatic calf feeder. When you look at the machine from the calf's perspective you must think how great it is to get something to eat anytime they want. These calf feeders are the ultimate nanny! From the farmer's perspective, it's great to know that there is something feeding the calves 24-7. It doesn't call in sick, sleep in or even miss a shift. What a great tool! Farmer's that use these feeders are discovering the amount of labour this machine saves them in terms of mixing and feeding the calves, allowing them more time to spend observing their animals and fine tuning their operation. They usually find that the calves are healthier, grow faster and wean a lot easier. There are many makes and models of machines out there. They are an investment in your future as these young stock are milking herd in two years!

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Is proper Udder Preparation Worth the Hassel?

Many dairy producers look forward to the end of milking, knowing that once the last group of cows leaves the parlor they can soon move on to more enjoyable tasks. Those that don't enjoy milking often skimp on udder preparation in order to get the cows milked faster. Is this a good idea, and does faster udder preparation really decrease milking time? The answer is no, and this misconception frequently hurts the producer in more ways than one. In addition to the likelihood of prolonging milking time, improper udder preparation also raises the risk of decreased udder health, encourages the production of poorer quality milk, and increases the chances of reduced dairy profitability.

How can faster udder prep prolong milking time and why should milkers bother taking the time to forestrip? Without a doubt, these are time-consuming and labor intensive activities. However, they are worth every second of the time it takes to do it right! Forestripping accomplishes two things. One, it allows the milker to visually evaluate the milk for signs of mastitis and prevents much of the high SCC milk occupying the teat cistern from entering the bulk tank. Two, forestripping encourages the cow to let her milk down faster and more completely which facilitates faster milkout. Dr. Andy Johnson, reports that research has shown a decrease in milking unit on-time of one minute per cow when cows are forestripped versus when they are not.

Getting teats clean and dry prior to milking unit attachment is another critical objective of proper udder preparation. To achieve this, milkers should always wear latex or nitrile gloves, pre-dip should remain on the teats for at least 30 seconds, and teats should be thoroughly cleaned and dried with absorbent paper towels or wash cloths. When you maximize removal of dirt and bacteria from the teat surface, bacteria counts, SCC and milk production will all improve. Bacteria that aren't on the teats can't end up in the milk or the udder!

Consistency is an important consideration in nearly all aspects of dairy management. The less variation cows experience in their day to day routines, the better they will perform. Udder preparation is no exception to this rule. Producers should develop a written protocol for udder prep that is strictly followed by all milkers. A Danish study reported a 5.5% increase in milk yield (for a complete lactation) when a standardized milking routine was used compared to a variable milking routine. That's the same as increasing your rolling herd average from 20,000 to 21,100 pounds!

With the considerations discussed above in mind, here is a proposed protocol for udder preparation. For some producers, the protocol will be quite different from their current routine. Therefore, it will take a full commitment by all milkers as well as ongoing review and reinforcement by managers to keep the new protocol in use long enough for it to become second nature. However, increased production, milk quality, udder health, and profitability should be the reward reaped when the change is a success. (Dr. R. Tom Bass)

Suggested Pre-Milking Udder Preparation (adapted from Reneau and Johnson)

1. Milkers should wear clean latex or nitrile gloves and utilize a territorial milking routine.
2. Cows should enter the parlor with clean udders. This reduces the amount of time needed for proper udder preparation.
3. Cows should usually be prepped in groups of 3 or 4 in order to achieve the desired lag time of 60-90 seconds.
4. For each cow in the group, dip the lower 3/4 of the teats in pre-dip then strip each teat 2-3 times, making sure to rub the pre-dip into the ends of the teats as you go.
5. After all cows in the group have been dipped and stripped, return to the first cow and begin drying teats and attaching milking units. Milking units should only be attached to teats that are clean and dry.
6. Minimize prepping variation between milkers and milkings. Make sure the protocol is written down and that all milkers are actually following it.

Happy Easter

Wishing you a Blessed Easter and good farming.

On behalf of everyone at the W-S Feed & Supplies Ltd. Family.

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