

# 3 open minutes

## with Lewis Anderson



DCHA President, Calf Management Consultant  
Co-chair of the Gold Standards Review Committee

Download a copy of the standards at [www.progressivedairy.com/downloads/2009/15/1509\\_DCHA\\_standards.pdf](http://www.progressivedairy.com/downloads/2009/15/1509_DCHA_standards.pdf)

*The Dairy Calf and Heifer Association (DCHA) recently announced new calf-raising standards for Holstein calves from birth to 6 months old. Progressive Dairyman Editor Walt Cooley discussed the development and industry impact of the new standards with DCHA President Lewis Anderson.*

### Q What are the new DCHA Gold Standards?

**A ANDERSON:** These standards are acceptable and achievable goals for our industry to monitor calf mortality, morbidity and growth rates. They will help us understand what we need to do when a calf is first born, including the basic needs of a calf such as a clean environment and colostrum management.

### Q What was the reason for creating them?

**A ANDERSON:** A lot of it came from continuous questions from

producers about what the calf-raising industry's standards are. Questions like: What should be my benchmarks? Am I falling short?

### Q How long have they been in development?

**A ANDERSON:** About a year. We sent out surveys, and at the DCHA's annual conference in Tucson this year, we had breakout sessions to get producer opinions about standards for each youngstock age grouping. We gathered all this information together and put the final numbers together with help from our support team and university faculty. The first set of standards, which has been approved and published, is for Holstein calves from birth to 6 months old.

### Q Who developed the new standards?

**A ANDERSON:** Producers, contract growers, consultants,

industry reps, DCHA members, university specialists and Pfizer, who provided the financial support to put everything together.

### Q How will these standards help producers and calf-raisers?

**A ANDERSON:** We feel as producers or better they will have the ability to be more successful. They will have not only healthier animals but be able to stand up to more political pressure from activist groups while also adding value to their bottom line.

### Q Did activist groups force the creation of these standards?

**A ANDERSON:** No. This is something that DCHA for the past five to six years has talked about on a regular basis. I think with the Prop 2 movement that we saw in California and other movements we

have seen in other parts of the U.S. we know there is a lot of concern out there about how animals are treated. We wanted to put ourselves out in front and not try to catch up. Academia, common sense and good judgement all say these standards are achievable and workable.

### Q Which of the standards was the most difficult to develop?

**A ANDERSON:** The one that had the most discussion was calf housing. I think that is because there is such a wide variety of housing options available whether it be barns, enclosed structures, hutches, pasture. It was difficult because producers in Georgia or Alabama have housing needs that are different than those in northern Wisconsin. When we came to housing, we ended up setting some fairly general standards.

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**Q** How do you anticipate breaking up the next age group of standards you are developing?

**A ANDERSON:** We will probably start to tackle from 6 months to breeding, then another grouping from bred heifers to springers.

**Q** Will the standards be continually reviewed?

**A ANDERSON:** Yes. As we learn about new things and new technology, we may find that we need

to raise the bar a little bit more.

**Q** Who will be responsible for reviewing and updating?

**A ANDERSON:** A committee which will involve allied industry, academia, DCHA members and progressive growers. They will review the standards every two to three years.

**Q** Why do you personally think these standards are needed?

**A ANDERSON:** I've always felt there needed to be standards. Take,

for instance, mortality. One of the things I have found as I have traveled the country and visited other facilities is that one guy will start his death loss right when the calf is born and another will not start counting death loss until the calf is 14 days old. There had to be some kind of line drawn in the sand.

**Q** What was the most interesting part of the comment review process?

**A ANDERSON:** I think one of the interesting things was the

misunderstanding about acceptable growth rate. A few felt that if they were gaining a pound a day they were doing really well. But even if you go by national averages, we know most calves are gaining way above a pound a day.

**Q** Where did you find that scientific research and reality were the farthest apart during your standards review?

**A ANDERSON:** I would have to probably say morbidity and health issues. One of the things we saw as we visited different dairy producers and calf-raisers is that those who had more information sources available to them seemed to be doing a better job than those who were far removed from the same resources. Producers who were closer to research universities, extension services or good veterinarian clinics seem to thrive more.

**Q** Why involve Pfizer in the standards creation process?

**A ANDERSON:** As far as Pfizer was concerned, their involvement was to help us put the program together and gather information, but in no way did they influence the outcome of the surveys or the outcome of the final document. There's nothing in these standards that would lean towards any one type of vaccine, antibiotic or treatment.

**Q** What advice would you give to other group, or producers themselves, who may be trying to set up standards?

**A ANDERSON:** You need to gather as much information as possible, both scientific research and also realistic data. Then you need to bring science and reality together and find a common ground.

**Q** What is the next step for these standards?

**A ANDERSON:** Training and teaching about these standards will be part of our annual conferences, as well as our webinars. We also know there are many out there who are doing better than these standards. We want to applaud these producers and find out how they were able to achieve success.

**Q** Which part of the just-released standards is most likely to be revised?

**A ANDERSON:** Colostrum management. We still have a lot to learn about colostrum management, not only its effects on the calf, but also about the number of producers or raisers who don't understand the absolute importance of feeding colostrum and colostrum management. **PD**

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