

## Data Collection Guidelines

Many people purchase a record-keeping system for their dairy, but fail to realize its full potential not because they fail to learn the program, but because they fail to implement a good record *collection* system. The most expensive dairy software will be of little use unless the user can:

- Get data collected and entered accurately and completely
- Get the information back to the people who use it, in a timely useable fashion.

Data is not useful to you. It is merely an unsorted list of events, such as collected in a dairy diary. Information is what you want, and what you want to give to your employees. You collect data; you use information.

### Data Collection

In many ways, the most difficult part of learning a new program has nothing to do with the software itself. You need to establish a system of data collection and movement that is:

- Accessible to all
- Easy to use
- Complete

A system can easily be set up to be accessible. You can put a calendar or notebook in a central location, such as the changing room or milk house; and you can create forms that prompt for items in the order those items appear in Data Entry. But the balance of ease of use and completeness may be difficult. If the herdsman has to fill out huge forms just to record a heat, the chances are it will get postponed, then forgotten. Prompt for data you wish to collect (why a cow in heat was not bred, for example, if you think that is important). Just because the software prompts for particular items does not necessarily mean that you need to collect it.

Once collected, it needs to be transferred to the computer. Depending on the size of your herd, this can be once a day, every other day, or whatever. Just so long as you are consistent.

### Returning Information

Timeliness and accuracy are the keys to good information, and the two go hand-in-hand. A perfect, wonderful list of cows that need watching is useless if the data that is driving it is a week old. Put the reports back in the same accessible location that you collected the data from. Encourage your employees to use the reports, and get feedback from your employees as to what they think would be even more useful.

