

Pasture

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NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) conservationist," she said. "He had statistics showing it is 50 cents cheaper per head per day to raise heifers on grass than in confinement."

Abel also cited a University of Minnesota study that showed pastured heifers have 50 percent fewer displaced abomasums, 60 percent less calving difficulty and 33 percent fewer cases of milk fever. Also, there were no skeletal injuries compared with 10 percent of confined heifers that suffered injuries.

Pastured heifers also are more fertile and have fewer respiratory problems.

"These things affect profit and also sets the tone for the rest of their lactation and their productive life," Blazek said.

She wants to get data from several counties and extend the research that has

already been done.

"Studies from Minnesota and from our research stations on heifer health are from 2007 and outdated. We need something more recent and timely," she said. "We need some good demonstration farms to show that it works. Then the neighbors pay more attention."

If custom heifer raisers make a case for it because it's cheaper, and if owners get over their fear of what they'll get back, it will catch on, she said.

"Owners are the challenge; most custom heifer raisers already want to do it," she said. "There is plenty of experience and knowledge out there about how to do it, but the heifer owners have to take that step."

With improved pasture and good management, you can get just as much yield as from an alfalfa field, with less investment.

"The heifers harvest and fertilize it," she said. "Instead of storing manure in the dairy facility, the heifers are spreading it out on the field."

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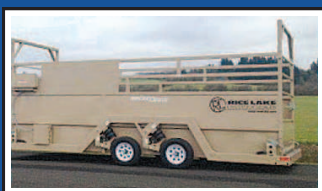
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