

Selected Comments from the 1997-98 rBST Survey

by L. J. (Bees) Butler

We decided that many of the remarks made by dairy producers on their experiences with rBST add a different dimension to the often sterile and boring statistics that are usually reported. (See Winter, 1998 issue of *ARE Update*.)

A survey of 1500 California dairy producers was carried out in the fall of 1997 and the winter of 1998. The following remarks have been heavily edited and reflect some comments from past and current users.

- *BST works well. As long as the price of milk and feed cost justify using it, taking into account labor and time.*
 - *Sophomore slump. Seems many do not react as well the second time around. Does the cost of BST work on the \$11.00 California milk price?*
 - *Individual response varies. SCC is higher. Too much work with no lock-ups. Breeding efficiency is lower.*
 - *BST was not a positive experience for us. Lots of milk but little profit. The second year we only got enough response to cover the cost of the product. We enjoy dairying much more without "the shots". Have no plans for future use, but will try to stay open-minded.*
 - *Very pleased with the product. Unable to detect any adverse effects on livestock. Producers not using BST, in my opinion, have an economic disadvantage.*
 - *I have used BST now for over four years. I really believe that when all is said and done, only Monsanto makes money on it. Many of my friends have quit using it and are happy they did. I am considering stopping its usage as well in my herd.*
 - *I found that the use of BST required us to be more aggressive at challenge-feeding our cows. If they are underfed it takes much longer to get body scores back to acceptable levels. The use of BST has allowed us to keep breeding-problem cows in the herd that otherwise would have been culled for low production caused by extended lactations.*
 - *We tried it and didn't get the results we should have. We lost a few udders on 2-year-olds. Overall we were disappointed with our results. We also used our feed consultant and veterinarian in our decision to stop. Milk production is higher today than when we were on it. Higher herd average and daily weights.*
 - *When we use BST on our dairy in the summer we don't get the response that they say and in the winter I feel we get more than our fair share of mastitis, which I blame on BST. We are off of BST as of October '97 and through now [February '98] our hospital is less than 2%. The last few years we have had as high as 12% hospital and an average of 5% total. This year I will make more money off of BST than on it.*
 - *Initially I was very much against it. Today I feel it is a management tool, but that very few dairies can use it successfully. It requires the highest level of management, i.e., nutrition and reproductive. Feed must be adequate and of highest quality.*
 - *Experience: began by injecting 70% plus for one year in one herd and 0% in the other. Estimated response in injected cows at 8 lbs. Became concerned after one year with lengthened days open and calving interval. Production seemed to wane some. How much, I do not know. Second year we are injecting later DIM: will reevaluate after second year.*
 - *I believe that when cows are in stressed condition, problems arise with BST—mastitis, etc. I have used it to keep problem breeders milking with success. When I tried to be more aggressive with it, I had too many cow health problems.*
 - *BST is a great management tool. It isn't a cure-all for poor management, nutrition, breeding problems, etc. BST works well when all the other dairy parameters are under close watch and are working well. My experience still is not a very positive one. BST works better on some cows. I continue to use BST, but have quit 2x and restarted using it later on, just to make sure I'm not losing out on lost opportunities for increased production, but I'm still not overly pleased with the results.*
 - *Don't like, but use to stay competitive.*
 - *BST has had a positive economic impact on our herd on the whole. Our main concern is the effect it has on 2 yr. olds. They get old fast...I would just as soon not push our cows for all they're worth.*
 - *BST should be used judiciously, only on healthy, heavy cows. Those who are on the borderline of being beefed but are otherwise healthy. It should not be used on the whole herd. Maybe one quarter of the herd. It should not be used in place of good management and a good feed program.*
 - *BST doesn't work on all cows. Some cattle really respond, others so-so, others zero. Strange—isn't it?*
- Once again, these opinions do not represent a majority of California dairy producers. In fact, the majority of California producers do not use rBST either because they are opposed to its use or do not find it economically feasible for their operations. These opinions most represent the 30-35 percent of California dairy producers who have used or currently use rBST.
- A number of conclusions seem to emerge from these comments. First, it is clear that there is still a substantial amount of uncertainty about using this technology. Second, cow health problems are often associated with rBST use, but there does not seem to be any consistent pattern of occurrences. Finally, there is clearly still some concern about the profitability or cost effectiveness of rBST. All in all, one might conclude that rBST is still very much in its infancy. The question of whether or not it will mature is still unanswered.
- To obtain more information about the rBST surveys in the California dairy industry, contact Dr. Butler by phone at (530) 752-3681 or visit his Web site at: <http://www.agecon.ucdavis.edu/Faculty/Bees.B/Butler.html>