EFFICIENTLY MAKING MONEY OUT OF YOUNG STOCK REARING

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The rearing of dairy replacement heifers often takes more than 2 years and is from a farm economic point of view an investment in the future without instant financial revenues. In today’s dairy farming, time spent per animal becomes less and demands high quality management skills. Farm areas without instant benefits are the first to become at risk of being (often unintentionally) neglected by the farmer. For dairy advisors it is a challenge to call farmers’ attention to this critical investment in the future of the farm and to aid in applying programmes to achieve rearing goals most efficiently.

Population-medicine addresses both healthy and diseased animals at herd or group level, with the focus on healthy animals and their profitability. Farm Health and Productivity Management (FHPM) programmes are the practical execution of population medicine. They regard young stock rearing as a production process, focus on farm-specific rearing goals and provide the farmers with structure, planning, organisation and coaching. Key aspects of FHPM programmes are Quality Risk Management and Applied Biosecurity, both based on the Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Points-concept.

FHPM programmes for young stock developed in veterinary consultancy have proven to be beneficial on dairy farms in several field trials in the Netherlands and Portugal. Performance indicators like heart girth, body condition, feed efficiency and incidences of diseases were monitored on a regular basis. Predefined preventive and corrective actions proved to control hazards and their risk factors in the rearing process. The FHPM-programme provided farmers with both measurable and immeasurable benefits. Less diseased animals, less treatment costs, improved growth and development lead to a reduced (farm-specific) cost price. Although hard to quantify, an increasing perception of process-overview and better job satisfaction appeared also to be very valuable for farmers.

In today’s veterinary practice, the main focus is shifting from “curing diseased animals” towards “keeping animals healthy”. Next to offering farmers a FHPM programme in e.g. young stock rearing, this shift requires a proactive attitude, additional professional communication and marketing skills of the practitioner. The forenamed issues are elaborated in the presentation.