



# Record and **win**

Milk recording has been practised by dairy farmers across the world for the past 100 years or so. Milk recording was first used in South Africa in 1917. Milk recording was taken over by the government in 1919 and as of 1994, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) has been managing the scheme on behalf of the government.

## Plan ahead

Milk records help you to plan ahead and to identify problems in the milking herd. If you work with a computerised milk recording system, it is very easy to spot problems in the herd, such as a drop in production or protein counts.

Milk records allow you to view problems among individual cows and the herd as a whole. For example, after a week, you will be able to work out the average litres of milk produced by each cow per day. But that information will also allow you to work out the average production figures for the whole herd!

You can even trace whether milk production is due to stress levels during certain shifts, which could indicate a labour problem!

But you do not need a computer to do milk recording. It can be easily done by hand. You can draw up your own form or record the results in a special notebook. But do not use loose scraps of paper. They will get lost and you will end up with no information at all.

## Grow bigger

Milk recording is one of the quickest, easiest ways for smaller farmers to enter the commercial dairy farming sphere. Milk recording eventually leads to better quality animals, better production and quality products – which means more money in the bank. Milk records are a tool with which to bargain for the best price for your milk.

The main goal of milk recording is to ensure top quality milk. The producer can only deliver top quality, if he can spot problems and address them immediately.

Here are some basic rules to keep in mind when doing your own milk recording:

- Milk records must be useful. Do not record data that you are not going to use in future.
- Your records must be well-organised, so that you can convert them into useful information. Use tables, columns and headings to organise information.
- Keep your system simple. If it becomes too difficult and complex, you will not feel like continuing with the records. Keep it basic and to the point.
- Use your records to improve your farming enterprise. Records have no purpose if you are not going to use the information. If you note a drop in production, address the problem by looking for the source and fixing it. The problem can be feed related, stress related or even labour related.

## Things to record

There are many types of milk records that one can keep. These include production figures, veterinary records, calving (birth) records, feed records, condition scores, health charts (which will include information such as immunisation and other treatment).

Whatever records are noted, the form (a milk recording sheet for an individual cow) should contain the following basic information:

- The cow's name or number.
- Lines for different days/dates.
- Columns for insemination dates, calving dates, immunisation.
- Columns for milk yields (remember to make provision for morning and evening milkings if cows are milked more than once a day).
- Columns for test results (protein, butterfat, etc.).

Here is an example of what a form can look like:

COW NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_ MOTHER'S PRODUCTION: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	1 <sup>st</sup> AI	2 <sup>nd</sup> AI	Immunised	AM milking (litres)	PM milking (litres)	Protein %	Feed intake	Yield (average)

Remember that this example is a highly simplified form. You can make different forms for different types of records if you want to. You can have separate forms for feed intake, which can be divided into columns such as roughage intake, concentrate, etc.

**Join the milk recording scheme**

Mbisi, or the Milk Business Information System Incorporated, is a joint initiative of the ARC, the Milk Producers' Organisation and Taurus. It delivers a one-stop service to milk producers who take part in the milk recording scheme. Mbisi manages the scheme and can assist milk producers in a number of ways.

To find out how you can benefit from the Milk Recording Scheme, contact Schalk Greyling by e-mailing [schalkg@corpdiel.co.za](mailto:schalkg@corpdiel.co.za) or phone him at tel 012 667 1122.

If you want more information regarding training for milk recording, contact the Milk Producers' Organisation's Institute for Dairy Technology and speak to Jas Wasserman. His telephone number is 012 843 5743 