

## BST, Everybody does it? Don't They?

An issue that from time to time pops up is who are the people in the industry using bst and why or why aren't producers using it. The answer as to why they use it should be, that it provides some level of return on the investment of time, money and management put into its use. Whether there was an actual calculation of return on investment on using this product or a wag (wild a \_\_ed guess) is another matter all together. But, responding to the other parts of this question is somewhat easier though.

In May of 2003, results from the USDA, National Animal Health Monitoring System, Dairy 2002 study relating to the use of Bovine Somatotropin were released. This study assessed the use of recombinant bovine Somatotropin (rbst or bst) in dairy herds in 21 states (Michigan included). The purpose of this study was not to make a judgment on the use of bst, but rather identify how it was being viewed used by different segments of the industry. Overall, 15.2% of responding dairy herds were using bst in 2002. This was compared with the previous NAHM study in 1996 where only 9.6% of reporting herds used bst.

In the herds indicating they used bst, 59.1% of the cows in the current lactation received or were scheduled to receive bst. This was compared to 49.2% in 1996. The study found that bst treatments begin an average of 81 days post partum. As approved by the FDA, treatments are to begin at 57 to 70 in milk. The 2002 study indicated that the average end date for treatment was 270 days post calving.

Use of bst in dairy herds appears to be associated with herd size. In all, herds with 500 or more cows were 6.2 times more likely to use bst than herds with 100 cows or less. When broken down by herd size the 2002 study showed that only 8.8% of herds with less than 100 dairy cows used bst. 32.2% of herds with 100 to 499 dairy cows utilized bst and finally in herds with 500 dairy cattle or more 54.4% had one or more animals receiving or scheduled to receive bst in the current lactation. Similar results were found in the 1996 study with 6.5%, 21% and 38.7% of herds using bst at the same herd sizes. When analyzed by rolling herd average, regardless of herd size, herds with the highest averages (more than 20,00 pounds per cow per year) had the highest rate of use at 32.4%. Only 8.6% of herds with rolling herd averages between 16,000 and 20,000 pounds and just 2.2% of herds making less than 16,000 pounds used bst in 2002.

Regional differences were also apparent. In the West 22.3% of responding herds used bst in 2002. In the Southeast 14.1%, the Northeast 14.3% and in the Midwest 14.8% made use of this hormone. Of note is the fact that in the 1996 study the Midwest region recorded a use level of only 7.6%. This was the largest level of growth in use of any of the regions. Alternately producers that were not currently using bst were asked to describe their reason for not implementing a bst program.

Responses did vary considerably by region. Cost and animal health concerns were major concerns in all regions, but public health concerns were nearly twice as prominent in the Northeast region as in any other region. The Midwest and Northeast dairies reported "other reasons" as the principal reason for not utilizing bst in their herds. Included in "other reasons" were personal beliefs, dairy plant or creamery regulations and organic status. The West and Southeast listed animal health as the primary reason for not using bst. Clearly, there are local and regional differences in operation and opinion.

So what does this all tell us? It tells us exactly what you have read nothing more. Who is using bst and why others are not. Interpreting much more into it is probably not a safe bet. What this study does not look at was the decision made by these producers to use bst. How was it made and what criteria was used in determining whether to use bst or not? Will it actually provide a return on investment? Was this even a part of the equation? Get the answer to those questions and you will have some much more important information about the use of bst in the U.S.

If you would like to read the information sheets or the actual USDA report, you can find them online at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ceah/cahm/Dairy\\_Cattle/dairy.htm](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ceah/cahm/Dairy_Cattle/dairy.htm)