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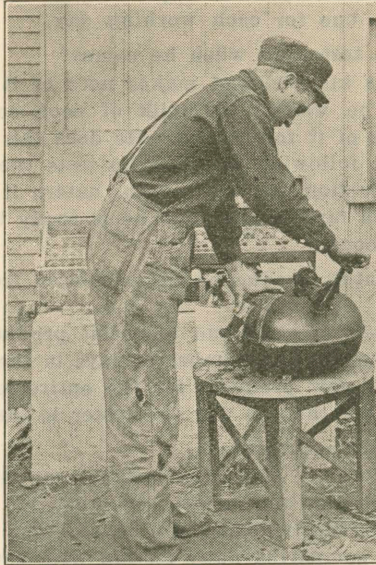
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## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT COW TESTING ASSOCIATIONS

Answered by Horace M. Jones, Extension Dairy Specialist



**A cow tester at work**  
(Courtesy Iowa Exp. Sta.)

**1. What is a cow testing association?**

A cow testing association is an organization of farmers who wish to determine the production and feed cost of each cow in their respective dairy herds.

**2. How many members are necessary?**

From 25 to 27.

**3. Who does the testing?**

A qualified man employed to do that work. He is usually a graduate of at least a short course in agriculture and one who has had some experience testing cows.

4. Who pays this man?

The salary, board, lodging and transportation of the tester are supplied by the association. Monthly or quarterly dues are the means of raising the necessary funds.

5. What other expenses are there?

None. The equipment is furnished by the Extension service of the State college at Brookings and the necessary books and blanks are furnished by the Dairy Division at Washington.

6. How often does the tester visit each farm?

Once a month. That is why 26 is the standard number for an association, one for each working day.

7. What does the tester do when he comes?

He weighs all feed and makes note of it in his book. At milking time he weighs the milk of each cow separately and takes a sample of it for testing. He does this both evening and morning. The following morning he tests these samples, calculates the production for the month, enters it in a book which is left with the farmer and then he is ready to move on to the next place at noon.

8. How can a month's production be calculated from only one day's milk?

The amount of milk and butterfat produced in one day is simply multiplied by the number of days in the month. It is assumed that the cow produces for the entire month at the same rate she does for the one day the tester is there.

9. Is such a method accurate?

Sufficiently so. While the test or amount of milk may be slightly off in any one month, it must be remembered that twelve tests are made during the course of a year. The Dairy Division, after comparing daily testing with monthly testing, has found that there is a variation of less than three percent between the two methods at the end of a year.

10. Must the milk be weighed every day?

Not necessarily. Results are much more satisfactory if each member keeps daily weights of milk of each cow, but if such record is not kept the tester calculates on the basis of the production for the day he is there.

11. What benefits are there from a cow testing association?

The records of the cow testing associations now operating show that one cow out of every six is kept at a loss. One of the main objects of the association is to get rid of these unprofitable cows. In addition to ridding the herd of poor cows, the testing association is also of value in that it indicates which cows could use more feed to advantage and which are getting too much feed already. Furthermore, it serves as a means of picking out the very best cows of the herd to be retained as foundation animals for the herd of the future.

12. Why couldn't I do that testing myself and save the expenses of a man hired for that purpose?

You can, but the experience of hundreds of dairymen located all over the state is that they do not. Furthermore, a man who is employed to test cows and who is doing that work every day tests more accurately and more quickly than the man who tests only now and then and who is not in practice. Besides you lose the value of comparison with other herds in the neighborhood and do not get the help on feeding problems which a tester is usually in position to give.

13. How much does such an association cost each member?

That depends upon how much you pay your tester. In the associations now operating it costs about \$3 per member per month.

14. Is this in addition to board and transportation?

Yes.

15. Is the price the same no matter how many cows a member has?

Yes, up to thirty cows. If a member has over thirty cows it is necessary for him to take out more than one membership and retain the tester at his place for more than one day. Thirty cows is all that a man can test in one day.

16. If I have only ten cows why should I pay as much as the man who has twenty?

In either case you are using one day of the man's time and after all that is what costs.

17. How is transportation furnished for the tester?

In some cases each member takes him to the next farm; in others he is furnished a horse and buggy by the association; and in still others with a cheap car.

18. How far is it usually between farms?

This varies all the way from a few rods to several miles. The average is probably about three miles. There are very few "jumps" of over five miles.

19. Would it not be better to keep the association in a smaller territory?

Yes, the smaller the territory the better. Too often, however, it is necessary to spread out somewhat to secure sufficient members.

20. Might it not fall to my lot to take the tester eight or ten miles?

Yes, it might, but such would not be the case every month. In case of a long "jump" they try to arrange it so that the same member does not have to make the long trip every month.

21. Which is the most satisfactory, taking the tester from place to place or furnishing him with a horse and buggy?

Ordinarily the better method is to furnish the tester with a horse and buggy or a car. This does away with the double trip

and saves annoyance to the member. The tester can then go whenever he is ready and does not have to wait for the member to take him or hurry his work to "catch a ride."

22. Are the records of an association published?

Usually, yes. This is a matter to be decided by the members, but it is found to be of value to publish the names, records and owners of the highest producing cows, and the herds averaging highest. It serves to stimulate higher production and increase the interest in the association.

23. How are the records published?

In newspapers and through circular letters to the members.

24. Are all of the records published or only the highest ones?

Ordinarily only the cows producing over 40 pounds of butterfat and herds averaging over 25 pounds of butterfat per month are listed.

25. How is the value of feed figured?

The price per unit is determined by following the price prevailing in the community from month to month. The best basis is to accept the price which one farmer pays another. If no transactions have taken place, then the best method is to strike an average between what the feed would bring if it were sold and what it would cost if it had to be bought. Where feed is actually bought (bran, oilmeal and similar feeds) figure the actual purchase price.

25. Does a cow's test vary from one month to the next?

Yes, that is to be expected. If there were no variation there would not be so much object in testing every month. There is often a variation even from one day to the next.

27. How much will a cow vary in test?

It is not unusual for a cow to vary as much as 2.0 percent from one milking to the next. Occasionally they will vary up to 3.0 percent and once in a great while even more. A cow is just as likely to vary from one milking to the next as from one month to the next. As long as the variation is not greater than 2.0 percent there is no great cause for concern.

28. What causes a variation in tests?

A change of feed, change in the weather, amount of water, physical condition of the cow, length of time between milkings, treatment by the caretaker, and several other things.

29. Can the test of a cow be increased by feeding?

Not to any extent. The best rule to follow is to increase the flow of milk by feeding and let the test take care of itself. It usually does so anyway.

30. What steps are necessary to organize a cow testing association?

See or write to your county extension agent at the county seat or write to the Extension service at Brookings.