

# Observations of Custom Heifer Raising by WI Dairy Producers

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Survey conducted by  
UW-Extension Dairy Team & UW-Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems

UW-Extension Dairy Team's "Raising Quality Dairy Heifers" Seminar  
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Rock Garden, Depere, WI & Fond du Lac County UW-Extension, Fond Du Lac, WI



# 2006 Custom Heifer Raising Survey

- Conducted jointly by UW-Extension Dairy Team and the Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems
- USDA “Dairy Industry Revitalization” Grant
- Nearly 800 respondents completed the survey
- Only WI dairy producers were surveyed



# The Farms who Responded...

- 76% of the respondents traded milk to 150 or more farms

- 90% of the respondents had a parlor

- 12% of the respondents utilized an automatic milking system

These are the perceptions of the average WI dairy producer!



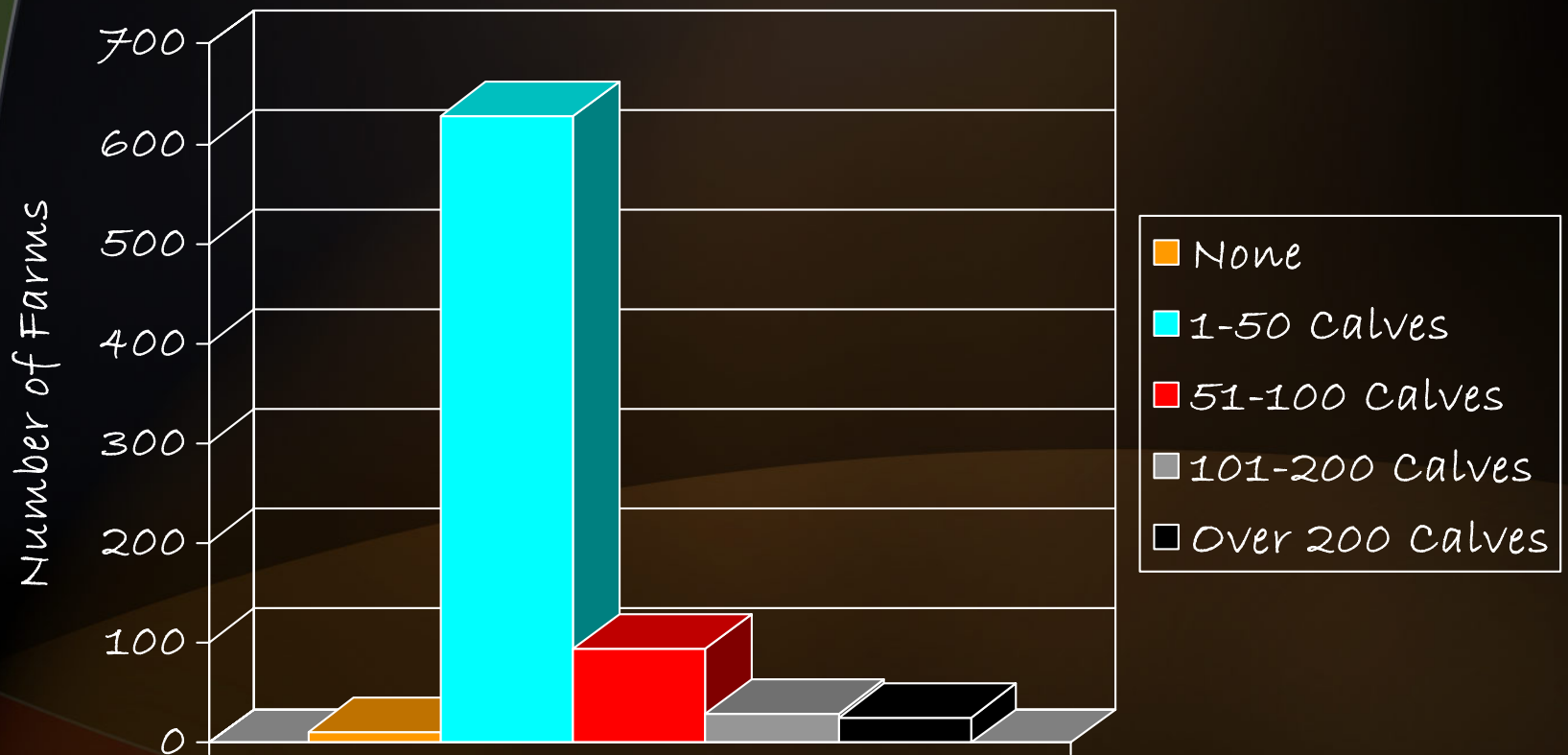
## *Their heifer raising operations...*

- 134 raise all bull calves on farm
- 669 raise all female calves on farm
- 558 raise all heifers are on farm
- 165 raise all dairy bull/steers on farm
- 56 of the farms utilize a custom wet calf grower
- 32 of the farms utilize custom heifer growers

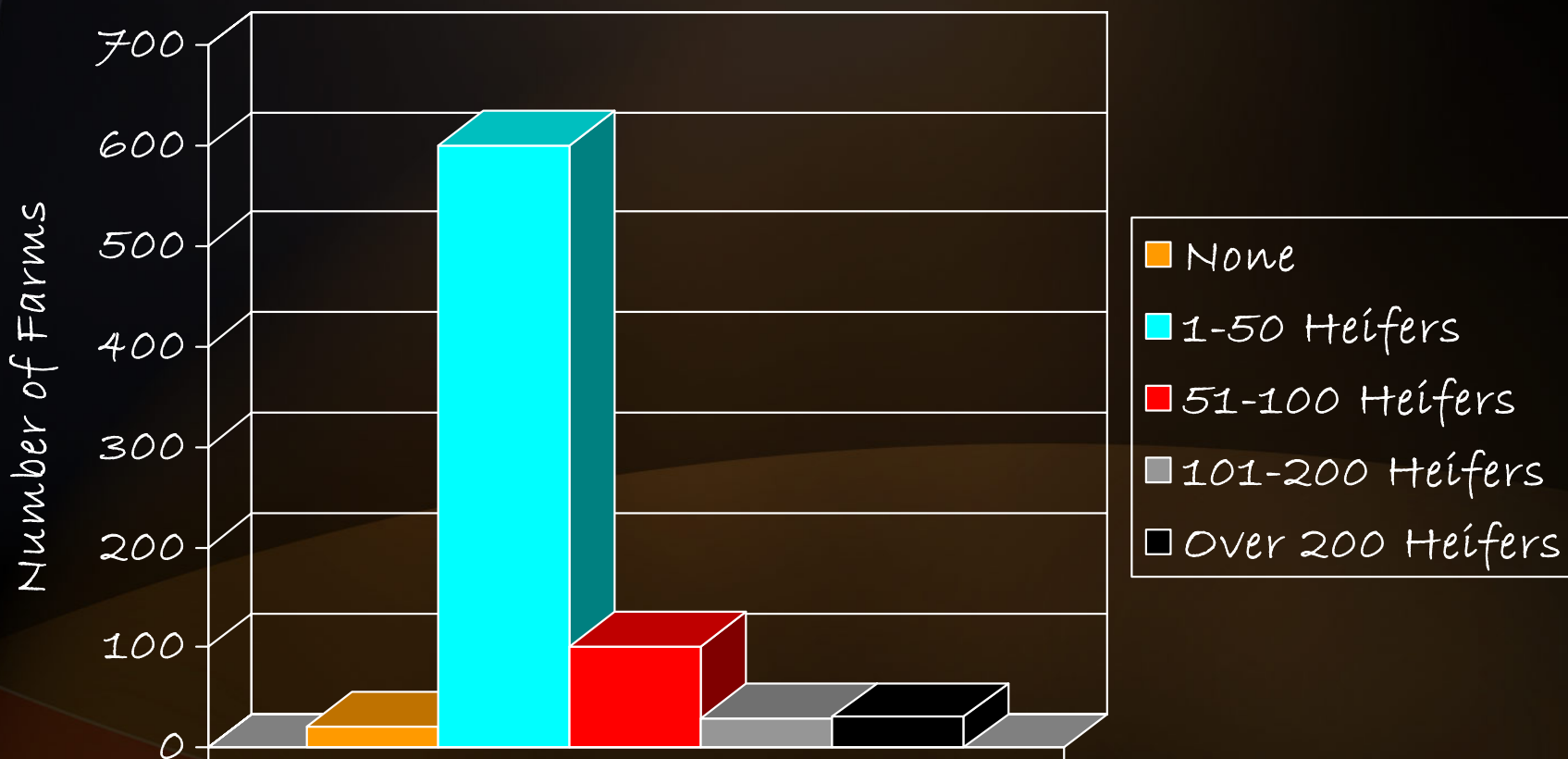




# Calves raised per year...



# Heifers raised per year...



# What is their biggest concern with custom raising heifers?



- Cost
- Disease
- Loss of management control
- Quality of heifers
- Other



17% have considered using a wet calf grower  
13% have considered using a heifer grower





# Questions asked...

- Section 1: Your Farm
- Section 2: Custom Heifer Raising
  - Housing
  - Managing Heifers on Pasture
  - Payment of heifer raiser
  - Concern with custom raising of heifers
  - Reproduction
- Section 3: You and your operation



# Defining the calf environment

- Resting surface
- Feed space
- Water
- Temperature
- Hair Coat  
Insulation
- Relative Humidity
- Solar radiation
- Ventilation
- Draft control



# Custom Wet Calf Raising Preferences

- Of those who have considered or are using a custom wet calf grower, which was their preference of having wet calves raised:
  - Individually, warm calf barn
  - Individually, cold calf barn
  - In calf hutches
  - In groups using group feeding system



# Which way do you prefer?





How do you think they responded?





# Calf Environment & Raising

- No s

The goal is to provide  
a healthy environment  
for the calf &  
optimize calf growth

pends

- Lab
- Management resources available



# Custom Heifer Raising Preferences

- Of those who have considered or are using a custom heifer grower, which was their preference of having heifers raised:
  - In a free stall barn
  - On pasture
  - In outside lots or mounds
  - In bedded pack open barns



Which way do you prefer to have heifers raised?





Which way do they prefer to have heifers raised?



# Aspects of heifer housing...

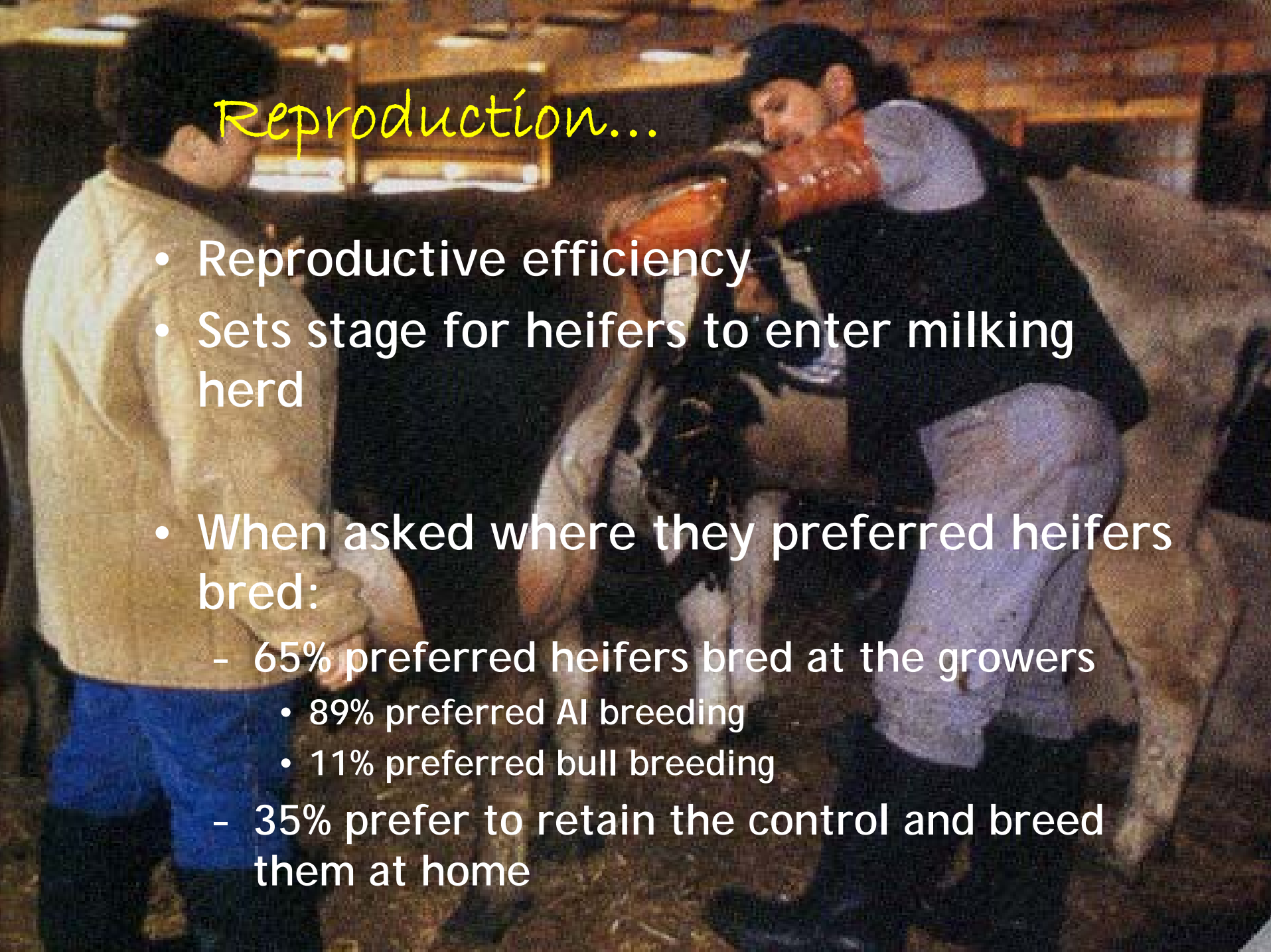
- Air temperature
- Solar radiation
- Humidity
- Precipitation
- Ventilation
- Resting surface
- Feed space
- Water access
- Space allocation
- Walking surface

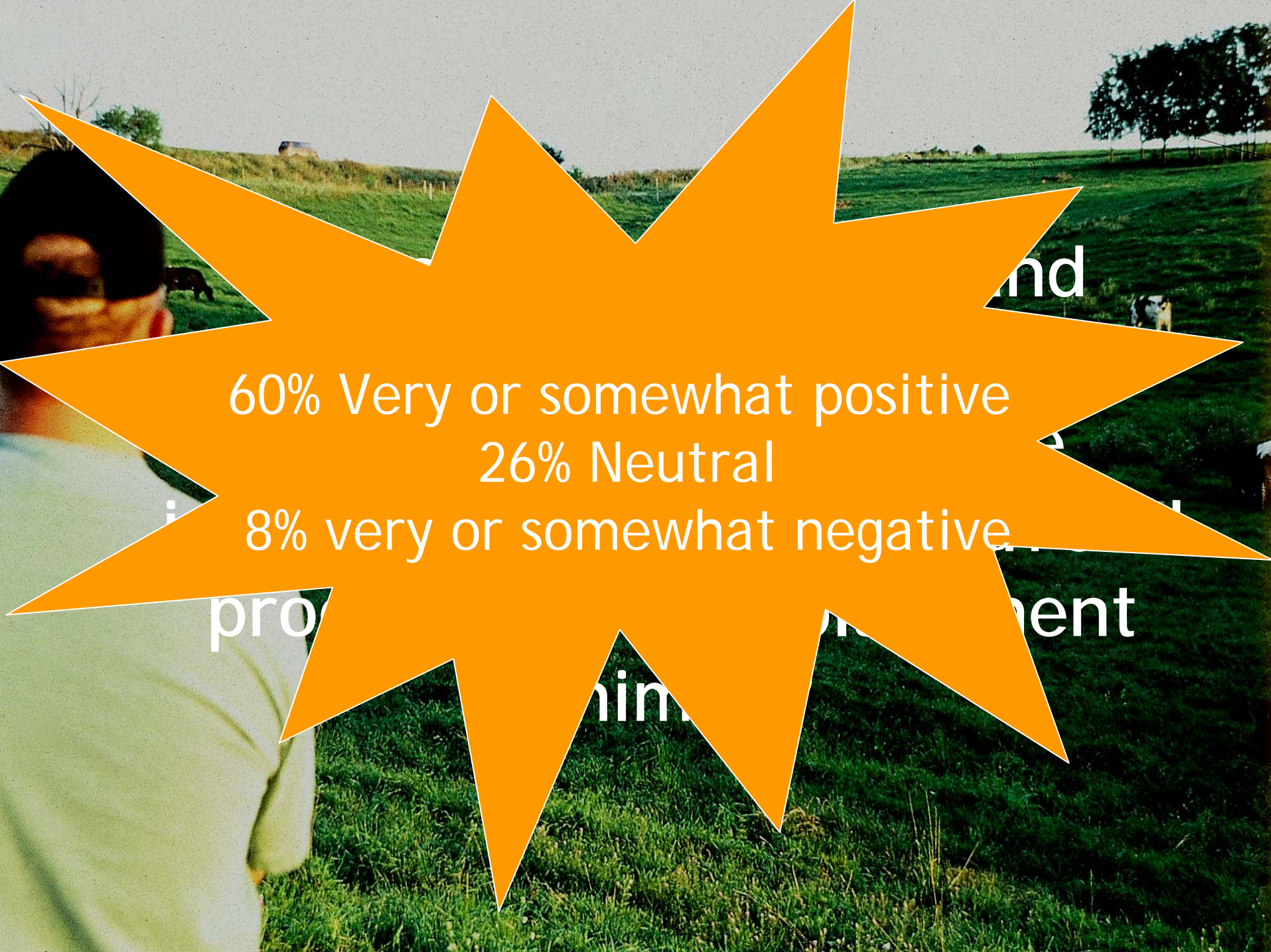




## Reproduction...

- Reproductive efficiency
- Sets stage for heifers to enter milking herd
- When asked where they preferred heifers bred:
  - 65% preferred heifers bred at the growers
    - 89% preferred AI breeding
    - 11% preferred bull breeding
  - 35% prefer to retain the control and breed them at home





60% Very or somewhat positive  
26% Neutral  
8% very or somewhat negative

pro

him

re

ment

*So the questions...*

If you

your own

½ would considered  
having heifers grazed  
by custom grower in summer

be just

if it saved you labor and feed costs?





52% would consider  
transferring their heifers



If you

the past,

55% would object  
to having heifers transferred  
to another grower  
in the summer

fers

between

growers?





59% would not consider such a business  
34% would consider such a business

Total cost to raise a heifer this way would be  
around \$950 per heifer.



# What is their biggest concern with custom raising heifers?



- Cost
- Disease
- Loss of management control
- Quality of heifers
- Other





What defines a successful  
calf raising program?

Calves are alive  
Calves are healthy  
Calves are growing well

# Goals of raising heifers

To raise a healthy  
productive heifer  
ready to enter  
the milking herd  
at 22-24 months of age







The best way to predict the future in the dairy industry is to help create it.

-Greg Henderson  
Monsanto Dairy Business



To help get us there...

- UW-Extension Dairy Team's "Dairy Workers' Training" Calf Management Skills Modules
- PDGHA "Raising Quality Replacement Heifers" BMP self-audit
- MWPS "Raising Dairy Replacements" Publication
- Numerous other resources



# Thank You...

Tina Kohlman & Abby Huibregtse  
Dairy & Livestock Agents  
Sheboygan & Oconto Counties  
UW-Extension

