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Walton, Bacheller receive National DHIA Outstanding Service Award

ST. PETE BEACH, Fla. (March 15, 2010) – Leigh Walton and Lillian Bacheller, Beltsville, Md., received the National Dairy Herd Information Association's (DHIA) Outstanding Service Award March 11, in St. Pete Beach, Fla., in conjunction with the association's annual meeting. Employees of the Animal Improvement Programs Laboratory (AIPL), part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service, they work as information technology specialists. For more than 30 years, they have provided computer expertise to support USDA's research program on the genetic evaluations of U.S. dairy animals, for which the primary data were records collected through DHIA. This award honors individuals who have dedicated service to improving DHIA and provided notable leadership to advancing DHIA.

During the early 1990s, Walton and Bacheller developed and implemented new AIPL editing routines. The former editing routines limited the accuracy of the national database of DHI records and hampered efficient data exchange and research. These revised edits allowed: 1) online access to USDA files by dairy records processing centers, breed associations, National DHIA, DHI affiliates, National Association of Animal Breeders and artificial insemination (AI) organizations; 2) daily or weekly editing of yield and pedigree data for early resolution of problems; 3) online determination of data disposition prior to submission; 4) immediate update of corrected data; 5) data storage for all test days, rather than just the last; and 6) data consistency throughout the evaluation system. The revised system provided dairy producers with information on why a specific animal did not receive a genetic evaluation and what should be done to correct the situation.

Furthermore, Walton and Bacheller played a key role in the success of an AIPL project that reduced the generation interval by decreasing the time needed to process and deliver estimates of genetic merit. In the mid-1990s, computer processing of genetic evaluations for more than 11 million dairy animals required editing more than 60 million milk records, solving more than 40 million equations simultaneously, and preparing computer output for distribution to 50,000 breeders, 100 AI organizations, 65 Extension specialists, seven dairy records processing centers, seven breed associations and 100 researchers in the United States and 40 foreign countries.

National DHIA, a trade association for the dairy records industry, serves the best interests of its members and the dairy industry by maintaining the integrity of dairy records and advancing dairy information systems.

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To receive a photo of Leigh Walton and Lillian Bacheller with their awards, send request to: jdsattler@dhia.org.