

MEDICINE AND MANAGEMENT

By CARL TROOP, VMD



Mini-pasture for calving is ideal

Pasture season is rapidly approaching and with it many changes in the feeding and management of the dairy herd. There are many new decisions to be made and there will be a few of what I would call non-decisions made; practices which are continued the way they have always been because that's the way it has always been done; practices which definitely could be improved upon; practices which have never been changed because one has never considered the possibility that there is an alternative practice to follow.

One of these non-decisions made by default each pasture season is where the cows are going to calve. Mostly they are left to calve where they are pastured; a few are put in the maternity area used during the Winter. Neither way is ideal. I would like to suggest an alternative.

If cows would never have problems, the pasture area would be an ideal place for calving. But, unfortunately, cows do sometimes have problems. The three most important at calving time are difficulty calving, mastitis, and milk fever. And with all three the urgency with which they are discovered is of the utmost importance. Therefore one will want his expectant cattle in an area where he can easily and frequently check on them. If in a large pasture, usually far from the buildings and usual area of activity, they are often neglected between milkings and nothing unusual is noticed until they don't come in with the rest of the cows. And as cows are, when there is a problem, they usually locate themselves in the most remote section of the pasture, often inaccessible by vehicle which makes location, treatment, and consequent aftercare quite difficult, especially if she cannot move to a more convenient area providing her own locomotion. It means extra unnecessary efforts on the part of the farmer and veterinarian, but more importantly, valuable time has elapsed in discovering that there is a problem; time which could mean the difference between routine treatment and recovery or a problem which has existed for hours and has added new complications and stress.

So logically one would want his Summer maternity area to be close to the buildings, for convenience in checking and treating, and a confined area to make it easier to locate the

particular animal several times a day. The Winter maternity area usually meets these requirements, but it has other objections. It is often in an area of the barn, where, on hot Summer days the heat of a closed in area would be objectionable. But more importantly, it is quite helpful to let it stand unused for a portion of the year, to clean out, disinfect, and then neglect for a few months to eliminate the buildup of disease organisms and disease cycles which most definitely occur with constant use.

An ideal situation would be a small, grassy, fenced in area, near the buildings, providing water and shade. If it could be located near a building or pen where they can get into out of the weather, so much the better. It should be located convenient to the milking barn to facilitate movement to and from the milking area for two or three days post calving, until most chances of problems are past and she can join the rest of the milking herd. It does not have to be large, 100 foot square would be adequate for average size herds and on most farms it could be situated somewhere that the cows can be checked by a glance during normal travels of the day, without any extra effort.

After a hard day of putting in hay nobody feels like going on a search of the meadow to look for a cow due to calve, or for one suspected of coming down with milk fever. And too often when this is what is necessary, it is neglected. A Summer calving area could save a lot of time and effort, and possibly a cow or two. And when there is a problem, I'm sure your veterinarian will appreciate it also.

Following the last column on milk fever there have been a few requests for suggestions on providing a calcium deficient diet the last three weeks before calving. Corn silage has the lowest calcium content of all forages, but should not be fed to excess. Alfalfa hay has the highest and should be avoided the last three weeks. Straight grass, especially oat or other cereal grass hay provide the best source of low calcium roughage. For grains, corn, barley and oats are low in calcium. And with supplements monosodium phosphate has no calcium, while dicalcium phosphate, steamed bone meal, limestone, and calcium carbonate are all very high in calcium.

Feeding grass or cereal grain hay plus corn silage would provide roughage with a very low calcium content. A separate grain mix than that provided for the milking herd should be used to try to keep the total calcium intake below 40 grams per day, but increasing it immediately after calving to 100-150 grams per day which is sufficient for 60-100 pounds of milk.

American farmer

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feed the world. The answer, Jantzen reveals, is helping others to help themselves.

The goal should be to optimize production in America - not necessarily maximize it. The same holds true for poorer countries where just a little could go a long way. In the United States, Jantzen challenges, higher production goals are requiring greater and greater amounts of energy and fertilizer. Reducing our intake of raw materials would not sacrifice all that much production. That is what Jantzen would like to see the American farmer do.

The trend to greater energy intensification, bigness, and mechanization should be stopped, Jantzen suggested. "I'm not sure how to get out of it without asking for big sacrifices on the part of the farmer, but if we don't the number of hungry people in the world will increase. The point is: slow down energy intensivity and make resources more widely available," Jantzen concluded.

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