Brockett's Ag Advice

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Yes, you can make more money

Some farmers spend more to produce a unit of their product than others. This is a fact I have gleaned from more than 25 years of working with farm families on farm financial problems. I am convinced that many farmers are making inadequate use of their resources or do not recognize the need to change.

Some ideas

Last week I discussed feeding efficiency. This is the biggest area for change for dairy and livestock farmers. When I see where one dairyman sells twice as much for each dollar of feed as another dairyman, it is a convincing statistic.

Ventilation

Winter and summer ventilation is essential for all types of livestock and poultry.

—Use multiple fans plus adequate inlets for winter ventilation.

—Open things up, use circulating fans, block or whitewash windows on the afternoon sun (west) side of a building.

—Remember that ventilation has a number of jobs: moisture control; fly control; draft reduction; controlled air movement as well as temperature control.

—Do not put winter ventilation fans where they draw warm, moist, germladen air from adult animals to baby animals unless your intent is to kill the babies.

Raising calves

—Use colostrum as soon after birth as possible.

—Dip the naval in iodine.

—Treat for internal and external parasites on a regular basis.

—Provide clean, dry, draft-free living and feeding areas.

—Keep different sized animals separately.

Milking system

—Use somatic cell count as a management tool.

—Keep to a stimulation time of 1 to 2 minutes (time from washing to machine on) and a machine on time of 4 to 6 minutes per cow.

—Don't try to handle too many machines.

—Keep bedding dry and clean.

—Treat or sell problem cows.

—Have adequate and uniform vacuum. Check the regulator on a regular basis.

SILAGE MANAGEMENT BOOSTS MILK YIELDS FOR LANCASTER COUNTY DAIRYMAN

Most dairy farmers, and even some nutritionists, feel that corn silage is corn silage — an important source of roughage and energy but little more than that.

Ivan Shirk knows better.

Like most farmers across the U.S. who are trying to cope with today's tight economy, Shirk is constantly looking for ways to increase the income from his 45-cow dairy operation. By refining his silage management practices, the Lancaster County dairyman found he could capitalize on the maximum nutritional value of his corn silage and make it an integral component of his feed ration.

In a recent 127-day trial, Shirk compared two approaches to silage management. One approach yielded a high quality silage, increasing milk production by 6.9 percent over the trial period. The result was an additional net profit per cow of $52.51, calculated on the basis of $13/cwt for 3.5 percent milk.

Trial Carefully Monitored

Shirk chopped his silage to half-inch lengths when the corn was at the mid- to full-dent stage. Moisture level at harvest was about 66 percent.

Chopping at 66 percent moisture reduces field losses. Research shows when moisture level of the corn falls below 60 percent, field losses may range as high as 16 percent or more due to leaf and ear drop and downed stalks.

Chopping at the proper moisture and length also enhances the crucial fermentation process of ensiling.

Shirk simultaneously filled two 16'x60' concrete stave silos by alternating wagon loads of corn silage.

Silage going into one silo was treated at the blower with an inoculant from Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. The inoculant is a live bacterial product which helps ensure rapid fermentation and greater preservation of the ensiled nutrients. It was applied at a rate of one pound per ton of forage.

Corn silage in the other silo was not treated.

Shirk's Holstein cows were paired, with one member of each pair assigned to one of two groups. One group received untreated corn silage while the other received inoculated corn silage. The silage was about one-third of the balanced dairy ration, which also included alfalfa hay, supplemental grain mix and soybean meal.

Laboratory analysis of samples from both silos showed quality differences between the untreated and inoculated silages. Lactic acid production was 5.8 percent greater in the inoculated silage. Available protein also was higher.

In addition, dry matter losses were 44 percent less in the inoculated silage. The net result of inoculation was that more silage of higher quality was available to feed out.

Cows fed untreated silage produced an average of 44.7 pounds of milk per day. Cows fed the higher quality, inoculated silage produced an average of 47.8 pounds of milk per day — an advantage of 3.1 pounds per cow.

Stated another way, cows fed the higher quality silage produced an average of 393.7 pounds more milk per cow during the trial period than those fed the untreated silage.

"When I started to feed the treated silage I noticed a big difference over the untreated silage," said Shirk. "The cows ate the treated silage much better."

"The smell of the treated silage was much better, too," Shirk added.

Good management of silage can help ensure that more of the nutrients that go into the silo will be available in the silage that's fed out of the silo. Corn silage can supply more than just roughage and energy — it also can contribute nutritive value as an integral part of the total dairy ration.

One in a series of articles devoted to improved silage making sponsored by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.

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