

Minimize winter herd health problems

UNIVERSITY PARK — Veterinarians are called to dairy farms in winter months more often than any other time of the year. Farmers can cut down visits and ultimately reduce vet bills with certain precautions.

Increased confinement and inadequate ventilation create an optimal environment for pneumonia and other infectious respiratory diseases, says Penn

State Extension veterinarian Dr. Lawrence Hutchinson.

Poor nutrition, another major problem, according to Hutchinson, occurs in late winter because the herd is maintained almost exclusively on stored feeds that lose some nutritive value during storage.

Many of the stored or ensiled feeds become damaged due to heat-drying, ensiling or length of

storing time from harvest. The nutritive value of such feeds becomes poorer as winter continues and the incidence of nutrition-related illnesses, such as ketosis, twisted stomach and milk fever increase.

Periodic analyses of forages and feeds pinpoint deficiencies in a ration so that farmers can supplement and make necessary changes to achieve a balance ration.

Hutchinson says because of more animal contact, stress due to extremely cold weather and a high moisture content in the air and bedding, pneumonia becomes a problem in the lactating cows as well as heifers and calves.

By keeping exhaust and booster fans well maintained and providing the herd with at least four air exchanges an hour, farmers can minimize the rate of respiratory infections.

Wet bedding in calving pens provides a virtual hotbed for the organism E. coli, a major cause of calf scours. Farmers can reduce the incidence of calf scours by using dry, long-stemmed bedding, such as straw or corn stover.

Because animals remain inside

during winter, the calving pens tend to be used more, especially on farms with limited space. A pen may be used for a sick cow one day and a fresh cow with calf the next. Frequent changes of bedding help provide the animals with a cleaner environment and reduce the spread of disease.

To ensure further protection from scours and other transmissible diseases, calves are best maintained individually, either in outdoor hutches or indoor pens. Don't keep calves together before

weaning, advises Hutchinson.

A healthy cow will begin the winter months with ample body stores of nutrients but must rely on stored forage and feed during the latter part of the winter. A cow in poor condition to begin with starts the cold season at a disadvantage.

Reducing various detrimental effects on herds from the cold northeast winters can be implemented on most farms, however, to some farmers, winter can seem like the longest season of the year, Hutchinson observes.

Lancaster Co. DHIA

(Continued from Page D15)

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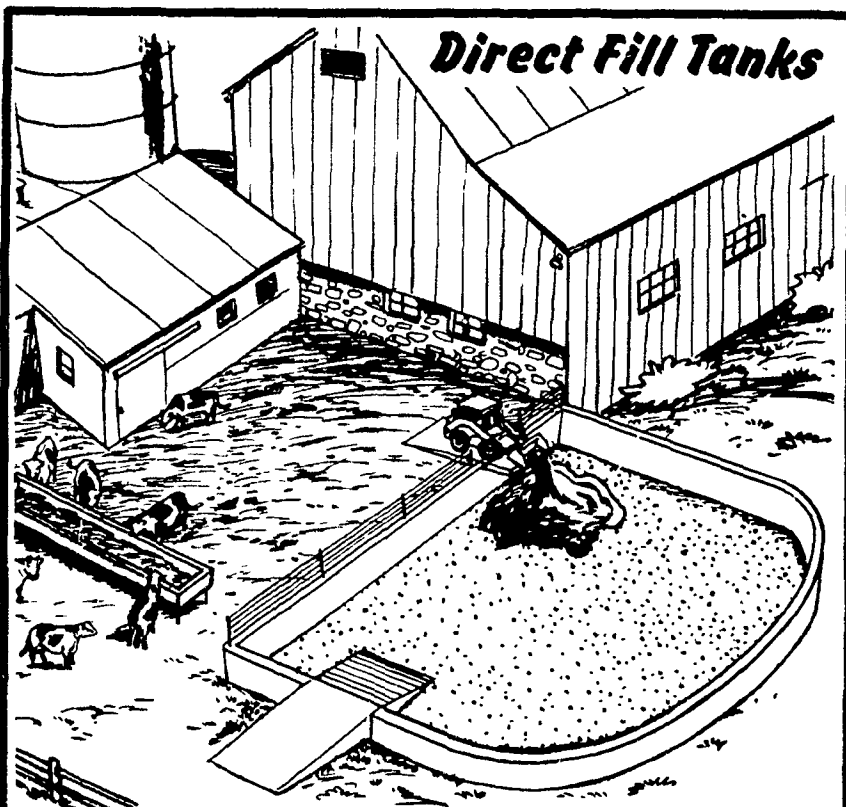
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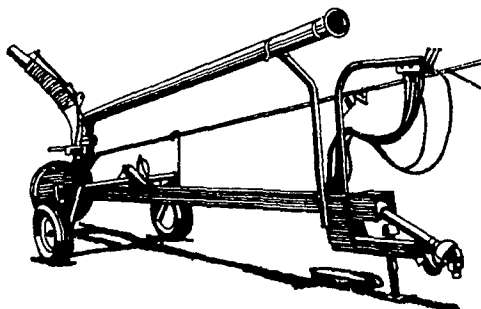
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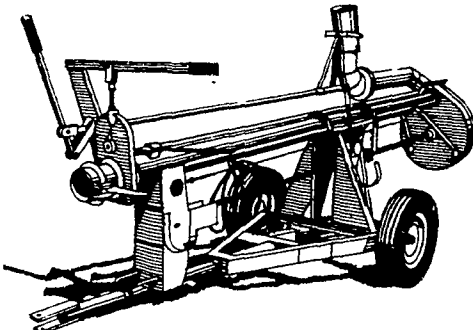
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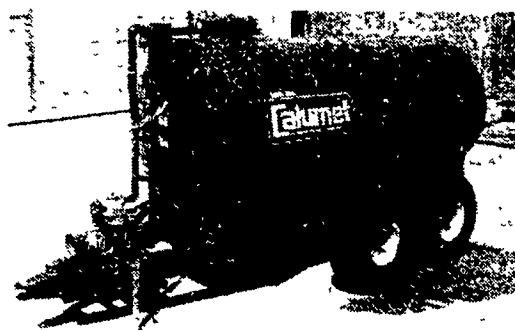
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