

Dairy Pipeline

By
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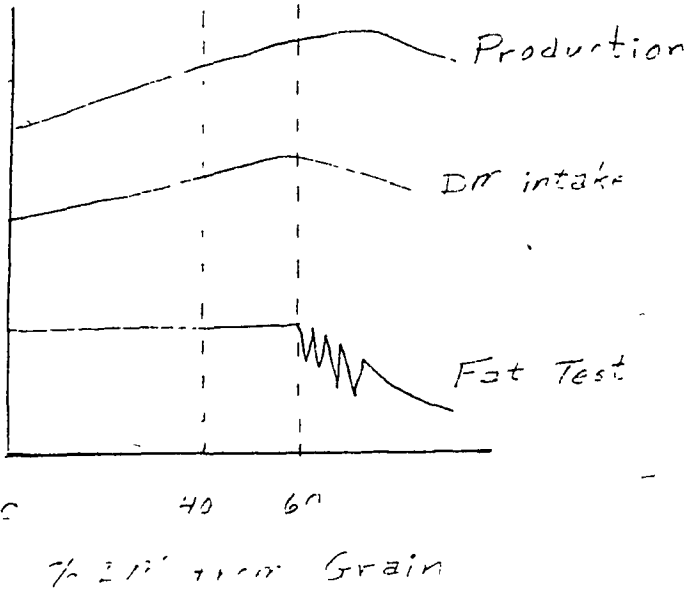
Fat Test Fluctuations
The 50-cent milk price deductions concern many dairymen. Will it take place? If so, how will they be able to make up for some of the loss?

One way might be to increase fat tests by three points. With a 17 cent differential, that would be 51 cents per hundredweight of milk. This is a possibility only if fat tests are a problem in the herd now, and if it can be raised without sacrificing

too much production in the process.

Fat tests are a problem on many farms - and there probably are some good reasons for many of those problems. Let me explore a few possibilities with you.

I recently attended an Agway meeting, and saw a good, graphic illustration of a problem which I see on many farms. The illustration is roughly as follows:



As we approach and exceed the "generally safe," upper limits of grain - the 60% level - we can expect fat tests to become very erratic for a while, then plummet to a more constant, abnormally low level. This, I believe, vividly shows what is happening on many farms - why a 3.8% tester one month suddenly drops to a 2.1% on the next test and then recovers to near normal on the following test - or why there is a rather wide discrepancy between DHIA tests and plant tests, with DHIA tests being lower.

These big fluctuations can be very temporary, and we are quick to find fault with sampling and testing procedures. If in question, compare DHIA protein test fluctuations with fat test fluctuations.

Chances are, if the protein test shows little, if any, fluctuation, you have a herd problem that is causing the fat test problem. Another check on the accuracy of individual cow tests is to submit a tank sample, preferably from a tank that was empty when the supervisor arrived for the first sampling. The tank sample should agree with the average test for the herd.

Why The Problem?

Why are more and more herds experiencing the problem? There are several possibilities.

1. We're pushing for production and greater profit margins. Grain is relatively cheap, so we're feeding more of it.
2. We may not be getting enough forage into our heavy producing


heifers and into our large, heavy producers. Here's why.

We have been programmed to assume that all cows eat the same amount of forage - at least on paper for the purpose of balancing rations and for writing down on paper a neat, simple feeding program for the herd. Then, we feed grain according to milk production, plus a few extra pounds for that growing heifer. The problem is, a lot of the herd is not 1300 pounds - herd average.

The smaller heifers may not have the capacity to consume what you feed the average sized cow. The larger cow needs more than the average cow. Consequently, their minimum forage needs of 1.5 pounds of hay equivalent per hundred pounds of body weight, are not being met. And, because we're pumping the grain to them for production and for growth, our forage to grain ration is out of balance - we've exceeded 60% of the DM in the ration coming from grain! This creates abnormal conditions in the rumen. Fat test quickly become erratic and exceptionally low - an indication of poor rumen health - and dry matter (DM) intake drops. Eventually, production will also start to decline. Similarly, when cows go off feed on forage for whatever reason - hot temperatures in summer, bad fermentations, poor quality, molds, stale forages, etc. - we experience the same problems.

3. We're feeding higher quality forage, which is lower in fiber content.

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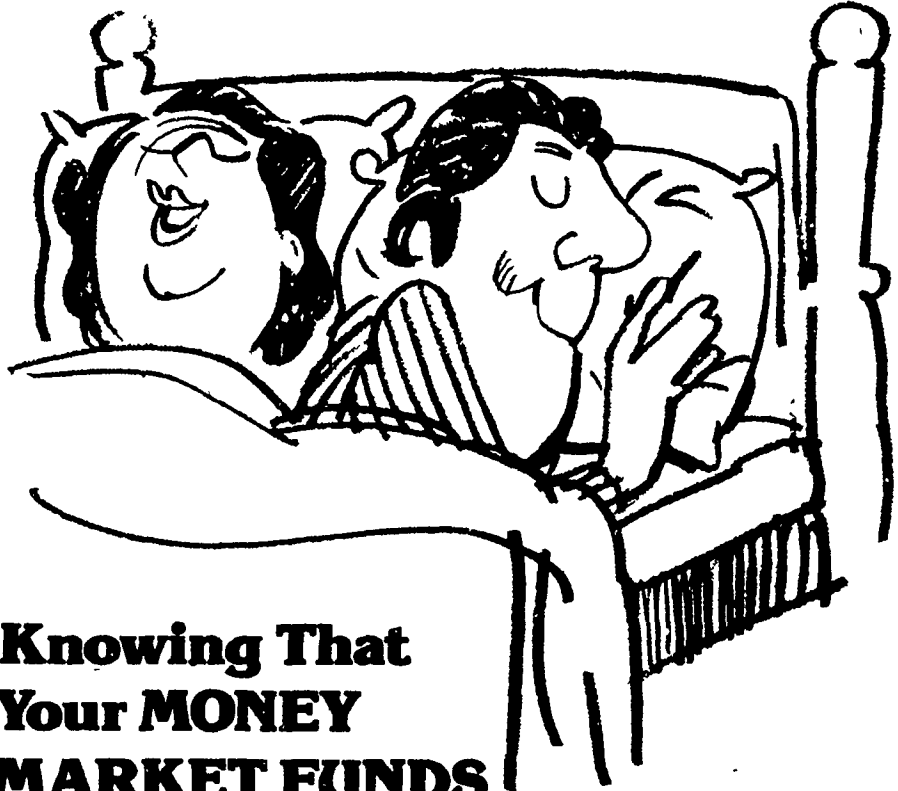
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