

Modern dairymen are turning to high energy grain rations to maximize milk production. That's because cows have a limited rumen capacity. If fed just bulky forages, they could eat only enough to meet maintenance requirements and produce a minimal amount of milk. High energy grains provide additional nutrients needed for higher milk output.

But along with this switch to high energy feeding has come an increase in rumen acids present in dairy cows' digestive systems. Dairy cows with too much acidity sometimes experience depressed butterfat tests, reduced feed intake and lower milk production, says Dr. Richard Adams, a dairy nutritionist at Pennsylvania State University.

One feed ingredient which has been effective in balancing rumen acids is sodium bicarbonate, a compound which occurs naturally in cows' saliva. Not enough saliva is secreted to neutralize acids produced when low fiber, high energy rations are fed. In these cases, supplemental feeding of sodium bicarbonate should be considered, Dr. Adams says.

Dairymen feeding sodium bicarbonate should supply it at about .6 percent of dry matter intake. "That's roughly equal to 1 to 1.5 percent in a concentrate mixture or finished feed," Dr. Adams explains.

Milk production, butterfat test percentage and dry matter intake may improve separately or in combination when sodium bicarbonate is added to high energy rations in proper amounts.

Dairymen might consider feeding sodium bicarbonate in combination with other feed ingredients such as magnesium oxide and calcium carbonate, he adds. Recent university research resulted in increases in fat-corrected milk when sodium bicarbonate was fed with magnesium oxide.

Calcium carbonate may neutralize acids in the lower digestive tract in contrast to sodium bicarbonate's neutralizing effect in the rumen. Fed in combination, these ingredients may help correct acid imbalances throughout the digestive system.



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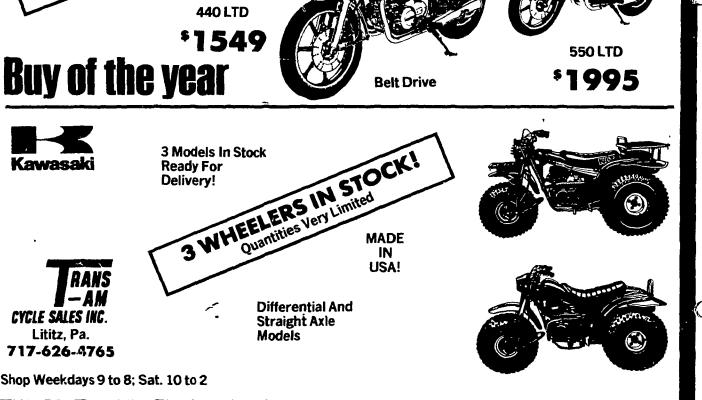
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