



Brockett's Ag Advice

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Increasing milk production

Reducing feed costs in relation to income or production is a challenging goal. Since feed costs are around 50% of the cost of producing milk and even a bigger part of the cost of producing meat, a small reduction in this cost will have more impact on overall profitability than reductions in any other area. What steps should you be considering to achieve this goal?

Balanced rations are a prime factor. Each category of feed (energy, protein, minerals, vitamins) must complement the others. In other words, animals need enough energy to make maximum use of the available protein as well as enough protein to efficiently use the available energy. Too much energy means

waste in the form of excess fat or unused feed. Too much protein means waste in the form of protein converted to energy (the dollar factor is about 7 to 1). Neither one will be used to economic advantage if the ration is lacking in minerals or vitamins.

Producing and feeding top quality hay crop forage is a must if you are concerned about reducing the cost of producing milk. Since high quality forage contains more protein and more energy and less fiber, the results are multiple:

- Each bite contains more nutrients.
- It takes less energy to digest the forage which leaves more energy from the entire feed ration to produce milk.
- The additional protein saves on

purchased feed costs

• Cows like the higher quality material more, therefore will eat more of it — that in turn gives the cow more nutrients for milk production (1 pound of nutrients will yield 3 pounds of milk).

Air movement and exchange is critical at any time of the year. Air movement removes stale moisture laden air which improves feed palatability. Air movement has a cooling effect in warm weather, just try it on yourself. Air blowing from a fan onto your face will cool you even though the temperature itself does not actually change.

Circulating air also reduces fly problems, cuts odors, and makes the cow more comfortable. Circulating fans are a big plus in any type of barn in the summertime, unless you have a barn that normally gets natural air flow. A comfortable cow will just naturally produce more milk.

Stress can be a factor. Stress can be caused by poor handling of cows, overmilking, undermilking, inadequate ventilation or air movement, malfunctioning mechanical items such as vacuum systems, or wide variances in routines. Stress can show up in higher somatic cell counts. It can also show up in reduced production or reduced feed consumption (same result).

Culling is systematically important for dairymen who are concerned about economic milk production. One good way to start on a reasonable culling routine is to evaluate each cow prior to breeding her. If she has low production or poor health or is a chronic mastitis case or is a pain to work with, don't breed her. She will make a little more milk for the feed you give her and will surley be culled down the road.

Dairymen should feed cows partly by production and partly by her stage of lactation. Most do neither adequately. As a guideline: Feed a cow as much as she will comfortably eat during the first 90 days of her lactation. Be careful that you meet at least the minimum standards for forage consumption.

After 90 days make her work for her feed. Use the forage test recommendations for the next 30 to 60 days depending on her production level.

After 120 days you could start to reduce her grain to milk ratio (calls for 1 to 3, use 1 to 3.5). If you have an ample quantity of good quality forage you could cut it even more than than.

After 200 days, you could have her on a very wide ratio. With good forage, especially hay type forage, a ratio of 1 to 6 or 7 would not be out of line.

Underfed cows at the front of lactation then make up for it by overeating towards the end of the lactation. That is a waste of money all the way around.

Now is the time to start on an economical feeding program by making as much top quality hay or haylage as possible. Hay was about 7 days early in maturity in the central part of the state. It appears to be a bit on the short side, though, so don't wait until it gets tall enough or it will be past its peak.

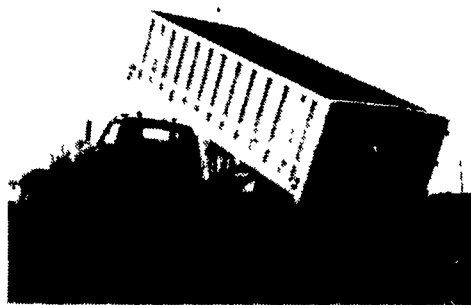


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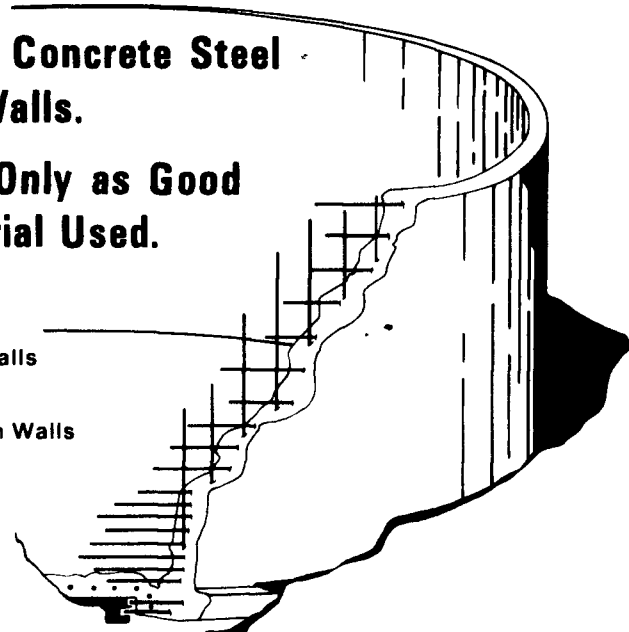
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